MINOR TACTICS OF THE CHALK STREAM

G·E·M·SKUES

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MINOR TACTICS OF THE CHALK STREAM

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MINOR TACTICS OF THE CHALK STREAM

AND KINDRED STUDIES

BY

G. E. M. SKUES

(*SEAFORTH AND SOFORTH*)

LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1910

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Dedicated

TO MY FRIEND THE DRY-FLY PURIST, AND TO MY ENEMIES, IF I HAVE ANY

FOREWORD

RISING from the perusal of "Dry-Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice," on its publication by Mr. F. M. Halford in 1889, I think I was at one with most anglers of the day in feeling that the last word had been written on the art of chalk-stream fishing—so sane, so clear, so comprehensive, is it; so just and so in accord with one's own experience. Twenty years have gone by since then without my having had either occasion or inclination to go back at all upon this view of that, the greatest work, in my opinion, which has ever seen the light on the subject of angling for trout and grayling; and it is still, as regards that side of the subject with which it deals, all that I then believed it. But one result of the triumph of the dry fly, of which that work was the crown and consummation, was the obliteration from the minds of men, in much less than a generation, of all the wet-fly lore which had served many generations of chalk-stream anglers well. The effect was stunning, hypnotic, submerging; and in these days, if one excepts a few eccentrics who have been nurtured

on the wet fly on other waters, and have little experience of chalk streams, one would find few with any notion that anything but the dry fly could be effectively used upon Hampshire rivers, or that the wet fly was ever used there. I was for years myself under the spell, and it is the purpose of the ensuing pages to tell, for the benefit of the angling community, by what processes, by what stages, I have been led into a sustained effort to recover for this generation, and to transmute into forms suited to the modern conditions of sport on the chalk stream, the old wet-fly art, to be used as a supplement to, and in no sense to supplant or rival, the beautiful art of which Mr. F. M. Halford is the prophet. How far my effort has been successful I must leave my readers to judge. I myself feel that in making it I have widened my angling horizon, and that I have added enormously to the interest and charm of my angling days as well as to my chances of success, and that, too, by the use of no methods which the most rigid purist could rightly condemn, but by a difficult, delicate, fascinating, and entirely legitimate form of the art, well worthy of the naturalist sportsman.

In the course of my too rare excursions to the river-side, I have elaborated some devices, methods of attack and handling, which I have found of service, some applicable to wet-fly, some to dry-fly fishing, or to both. In the hope that

these may be of interest or service, I have included papers upon them.

In conclusion I should like to express my gratitude to the proprietors of the *Field*, for permission to reprint a number of papers contributed by me to that journal over the signature "Seaforth and Soforth," which come within the scope of the work; and to Mr. H. T. Sheringham, for his invaluable advice and assistance in the arrangement of these papers.

G. E. M. SKUES.

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MINOR TACTICS OF THE CHALK STREAM, AND KINDRED STUDIES

CHAPTER I

OF THE BEGINNING OF THINGS

OF THE INQUIRING MIND.

I READ recently in that fine novel, "A Superfluous Woman," a sentence enunciating a principle of wide application, to which anglers might with advantage give heed: "We ought not so much to name mistakes disaster as the common practice of servile imitation and faint-hearted acquiescence." In no art are its practitioners more slavishly content "jurare in verba magistri" than in angling. Tradition and authority are so much, and individual observation and experiment so little.

There is, indeed, this excuse for the novice, that, going back to the authorities of the past after much experiment, he will find that they know in substance all, or practically all, that, apart from the advance of mechanical conveniences and entomological science, is known in the present

day. The difficulty is to dissociate the dead knowledge, which is reading or imitation, from the live knowledge, which is experience. And if these pages have any purpose more than another, it is not to lay down the law or to dogmatize, but to urge brother anglers to keep an open and observant mind, to experiment, and to bring to their angling, not book knowledge, but the result of their own observation, trials, and experiments—failures as well as successes.

In all humility is this written, for I look back upon many years when it was my sole ambition to follow in the steps of the masters of chalk-stream angling, and to do what was laid down for me—that, and no other; and I look back with some shame at the slowness to take a hint from experience which has marked my angling career. It was in the year 1892, after some patient years of dry-fly practice, that I had my first experience of the efficacy of the wet fly on the Itchen. It was a September day, at once blazing and muggy. Black gnats were thick upon the water, and from 9.30 a.m. or so the trout were smutting freely.

In those days, with "Dry-Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice" at my fingers' ends, I began with the prescription, "Pink Wickham on 00 hook," followed it with "Silver Sedge on 00 hook, Red Quill on 00 hook, orange bumble, and furnace." I also tried two or three varieties of smut, and I rang the changes more than once. My gut was gossa-

mer, and, honestly, I don't think I made more mistakes than usual; but three o'clock arrived, and my creel was still "clean," when I came to a bend from which ran, through a hatch, a small current of water which fed a carrier. Against the grating which protected the hatch-hole was generally a large pile of weed, and to-day was no exception. Against it collected a film of scum, alive with black gnats, and among them I saw a single dark olive dun lying spent. I had seen no others of his kind, but I knotted on a Dark Olive Quill on a single cipher hook, and laid siege to a trout which was smutting steadily in the next little bay. The fly was a shop-tied one, beautiful to look at when new, but as a floater it was no success. The hackle was a hen's, and the dye only accentuated its natural inclination to sop up water. The oil tip had not yet arrived, and so it came about that, after the wetting it got in the first recovery, it no sooner lit on the water on the second cast than it went under. A moment later I became aware of a sort of crinkling little swirl in the water, ascending from the place where I conceived my fly might be. I was somewhat too quick in putting matters to the proof, and when my line came back to me there was no fly. I mounted another, and assailed the next fish, and to my delight exactly the same thing occurred, except that this time I did not strike too hard.

The trout's belly contained a solid ball of black

gnats, and not a dun of any sort. The same was the case with all the four brace more which I secured in the next hour or so by precisely the same methods. Yet each took the Dark Olive at once when offered under water, while all day the trout had been steadily refusing the recognized floating lures recommended by the highest authority. It was a lesson which ought to have set me thinking and experimenting, but it didn't. I put by the experience for use on the next September smutting day, and I have never had quite such another, so close, so sweltering, with such store of smuts, and the trout taking them so steadily and so freely.

It was a September day two or three years later when I had another hint as pointed and definite as one could get from the hind-leg of a mule, but I didn't take it. There was a cross-stream wind from the west, with a favour of north in it, and all the duns—and there were droves of them—drifted in little fleets close hugging the east bank, where the trout were lined up in force to deal with them; and they fed steadily. Fishing from the west bank, I stuck to four fish which I satisfied myself were good ones, and in over two hours' fishing I never put them down. I tried over them all my repertoire. I battered them with Dark Olive Quill, Medium Olive Quill, Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear, Red Quill (two varieties), Grey Quill and Blue Quill, Ogden's Fancy, and Wickham, and

I left them rising at the end with undiminished energy, and went and sat down and had my lunch. Then I sought another fish, and began again, when suddenly it occurred to me that I had not tried the old-fashioned mole's-fur-bodied, snipe-winged Blue Dun. I had only a solitary specimen, and that was tied with a hen's hackle; but such as it was, and greatly distrusting its floating powers, I tied it on. I did not err in my distrust, for after a cast or two it was hopelessly water-logged. I dried it as well as I could in my handkerchief, and despatched it once more on its mission. It went under almost as it lit, just above a capital trout, but for all that it was taken immediately. The next trout, and the next, and the next, took it with equal promptitude; one was small, and had to go back, but the others were quite nice average fish.

Then, in my eagerness, I was too hard on my gossamer gut when the next trout took my fly, and he kept it. I had no more of these Blue Duns, and I did not get another fish till the evening.

Still I did not realize that I was on the edge of an adventure, nor yet did I realize whither I was tending when Mr. F. M. Halford told me how a well-known Yorkshire angler had been fishing with him on the Test, and, by means of a wet fly admirably fished without the slightest drag, had contrived to basket some trout on a difficult water.

Indeed, it was several years later that, after fluking upon a successful experience of the wet fly on a German river which in general was a distinctively dry-fly stream, I began to speculate seriously upon the possibility of a systematic use of the wet fly in aid of the dry fly upon chalk streams. In conversation with the late Mr. Godwin (held in affectionate remembrance by many members of the Fly-fishers' Club, and, indeed, by all who knew him), who had seen the very beginnings of the dry fly on the Itchen, and remembered well and had practised the methods which preceded it, I learned how, fishing downstream with long and flexible rods (thirteen or fourteen feet long), and keeping the light hair reel-line off the water as much as possible, these early fathers of the craft had drifted their wet flies over the tails of weeds, where the trout lay in open gravel patches, and caught baskets of which the modern dry-fly man might well be proud.

I gathered, however, that a downstream ruffle of wind was a practical necessity; and as I could not pick my days, and such as I could take were few and far between, I realized that, even if they appealed to me—which they did not—these methods would not do for me, as I might, and often did, find the river glassy smooth, but that, if I were to succeed, it must be by a wet-fly modification of the dry-fly method of upstream casting to individual fish.

I could not believe that the habits of the trout were so changed as to make this impossible, and I began to look for opportunities to experiment. The bulging trout presented the most obvious case, yet it was rather by a chain of circumstance than by the straightforward reasoning which now seems so simple and obvious that I was led into experiments along this line.

How I effected some sort of solution of the problem with a variant of Greenwell's Glory, and later on with Tup's Indispensable, is detailed elsewhere, as also are my experiments with the trout of glassy glides (who seldom break the surface to take a winged insect, presumably because of the drag), together with other fumblings in the search of truth; but from that time forth I have seldom neglected an opportunity to test the wet fly on chalk-stream trout. It may be that on many occasions I have used the wet fly when the dry would have been more lucrative. On the other hand, I have found it furnish me with sport on occasions and in places when and where the dry fly offered no encouragement, nor any prospect of aught but casual and fluky success, and I have provided myself with a method which forms an admirable supplement to the dry fly, and has frequently given me a good basket in apparently hopeless conditions, and in the smoothest of water and the brightest of weather.

CHAPTER II

SUBAQUEOUS HAPPENINGS IN NATURE

OF THE DROWNING OF DUNS AND OTHER INSECTS.

It has been advanced as an argument against the use of the wet fly, that duns and the other small insects which drift down upon the surface of a stream are never seen by the fish under water, and that a wet fly is therefore an unnatural object, especially if winged. "Never" is a big word, and I venture to think the case is overstated. I have watched an eddy with little swirling whirlpools in it for an hour together, and again and again I have seen little groups of flies caught in one or other of the whirls, sucked under and thrown scatterwise through the water, to drift some distance before again reaching the surface.

Anyone who has kept water-insects in formalin for observation or mounting is aware that they readily become water-logged, and by no means insist on floating. Again, we have it on the best authority that certain of the spinners descend to the river-bed to lay their eggs, and probably, that function performed, they ascend again through

the water, giving the trout a chance while in transit. Thus the trout may well be familiar with winged insects under water. Even if he were not, it may be doubted whether he is sufficiently intelligent to reject a thing which he fancies he has found good to eat on the surface merely because it happens to be below. Indeed, experience so conclusively proves that trout will take the winged fly under water that those who repudiate both these propositions are upon the horns of a dilemma. Many hackled flies are more or less—and generally less—careful imitations of nymphs or larvæ. But of these more anon.

OF THE STAGES IN A RISE OF DUNS.

It has often been the subject of admiring comment that, before ever the angler can see a single fly in air or upon water, the trout will have lined up under the banks, and settled at the tails of weed-beds, and have begun to take toll of insect life; and many have commented on the startling unanimity with which trout begin to feed all at once all over a river or length. Some seem to suppose that, with a quick appreciation of values of temperature, atmosphere, barometric pressure, and what not, the trout discern when the flies will rise, and are there in readiness. Is it necessary to suppose anything far-fetched? It has often seemed to me that the swallows and martins can and do detect in advance the preparations for a rise in the

swarming of nymphs released from weed or gravel, or whatever their particular fastness may be, and borne down the current. This precedes the actual hatch for a period greater or less according to temperature, pressure, and perhaps other little-understood conditions ; and so it happens that no trout that is not " by ordinar' " stupid could fail to appreciate that game is afoot, and to put himself in position to enjoy the sport.

If one goes down to the bottom of the High in Winchester, near by King Alfred's statue, and peers between the railings, one may generally see several brace of handsome trout ; and if one takes some new bread and presses it together in little balls hard enough to make it sink, but not sink too fast, and throws it to the trout, one may see some most beautiful catching, neater than that of the most finished fielder in the slips. So when the nigh-upon-hatching nymphs are being hurried down, your trout shall enjoy some pretty fielding before the bulk of the quarry come near enough to the surface to attract attention to the trout's movements by any swirl or break on the surface. If the trout be lying out on the weeds from which the nymphs are issuing, you shall see the trout swashing about in the shallow water covering the weed-beds, in pursuit of the nymphs, and presenting the phenomenon known as " bulging." This is the first stage of the rise.

Presently, as the swarm of drifting nymphs

becomes more numerous, escaping units, first in sparse, then in increasing numbers, reach the surface, burst their swathing envelopes, and spread their canvas to the gales as *subimagines*. Presently the trout find attention to the winged fly more advantageous—as presenting more food, or food obtained with less exertion than the nymphs —and turn themselves to it in earnest. This is the second stage. Often it is much deferred. Conditions of which we know nothing keep back the hatch, perhaps send many of the nymphs back to cover to await a more favourable opportunity another day; so it occasionally happens that, while the river seems mad with bulging fish, the hatch of fly that follows or partly coincides with this orgy is insignificant. But, good, bad, or indifferent, it measures the extent of the dry-fly purist's opportunity.

Good, bad, or indifferent, it presently peters out, and at times with startling suddenness all the life and movement imparted to the surface by the rings of rising fish are gone, and it would be easy for one who knew not the river to say: "There are no trout in it." For all that, there are pretty sure to be left a sprinkling, often more than a sprinkling, of unsatisfied fish which are willing to feed, and can be caught if the angler knows how; and these will hang about for a while until they, too, give up in despair and go home, or seek consolation in tailing. Often these will take a dry

fly, but an imitation of a nymph or a broken or submerged fly is a far stronger temptation. This is the third stage.

Now, the dry-fly purist is quite entitled to his own opinions, and to restrict himself to the second stage ; but if there be other anglers who are willing to vary their methods, who can and do catch their trout, not only in the second stage, but also in the first and the third, and if their methods spoil no sport for others, who shall say that they are wrong in availing themselves of all three stages of a rise of duns ?

I remember well one day late in May when the three stages were excellently well marked. There was a bright sun, a light breeze from the east with a touch of south in it, and I was on the water about 9.30, and took the left bank, with the wind behind my hand. No fish were rising, but on reaching the water-side I almost stumbled on top of a trout which stood poised over a clear gravel patch under my own bank. Fortunately, however, I withdrew without his seeing or suspecting me. My pale dressed Greenwell's Glory trailed in the water, and I delivered it without flick well wet a foot or so above the spot where I had marked my fish. There was no break of the surface, but a sort of smooth shallow hump of the water about the size of a dinner-plate, with a dip in the middle, as the fish turned and I pulled into him. Presently I saw a brace bulging vigorously over some

bright green weeds. It was not the first or the tenth time that my sunken Greenwell covered the fish that one of them came; but when he did there was no doubt about it, and he joined number one in the basket. Two more followed in a short time, unable to resist the same lure. Then it seemed to fail of its effect, though the river was freely dotted with rings, and after wasting much time I tumbled to the situation, and changed to a floating No. 1 Whitchurch—most effective of Yellow Duns—on a cipher hook. The effect was immediate, but I had put it off too long, and when I looked up from basketing my third trout to the Whitchurch the rise had petered out. But I was not done yet. I changed to a Tup's Indispensable dressed to sink, and, fishing upstream wet in likely runs and places, I made up my five brace before I knocked off for lunch.

CHAPTER III

SUBAQUEOUS HAPPENINGS IN ART

OF MEDICINE FOR BULGERS.

For many a year bulging trout were the despair of my life, and in those days I would gladly have said "Amen" to the opinion expressed in a letter to the *Fishing Gazette* of March 13, 1909, by the angler who writes over the pen-name of "Ballygunge," that when trout were bulging you "might as well chuck your hat at them" as a fly. Many times had I vainly plied them with Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear, as recommended by Mr. F. M. Halford, as well as most of the current imitations of duns on the water, and Wickhams, Tags, and other fancy flies to boot. Hoping against hope, I never gave up trying for those aggravating fish, and one day, towards the end of a bad exhibition of bulging by the trout, I actually caught a brace, and lost a third on a Pope's Green Nondescript—a dun tied with starling wing, red hackle and whisk, and a dark green body ribbed with broad flat gold.

On many occasions since I have found that fly kill well at the beginning of a rise, and it may be

that on the occasion spoken of the trout which I got were on the verge of giving up bulging in favour of the winged dun. But I was not satisfied. Then the recollection of a visit to the Tweed struck me with the notion that on that water all the trout practically bulged all the time, and that with their wet-fly patterns Tweed anglers were able to give a good account of themselves, and I searched among Tweed patterns for the nearest analogue to Pope's Green Nondescript. I thought I found it in Greenwell's Glory, if varied by exchanging for the hen blackbird wing a starling wing. The likeness was not very exact, but it was close enough to experiment on. The point that I wanted to achieve was to combine with the colours of Pope's Green Nondescript the type of dressing special to the Tweed Greenwell's Glory. Rough, slim upright wings, well split, and standing well apart when wet, made of several thicknesses of feather so as to absorb water, and not to give it up readily when cast ; body spare, consisting of the waxed primrose tying silk only, closely ribbed with fine gold wire, and one or at most two turns of a furnace hen's hackle with ginger points, no whisk (whisks only help flotation), and a rather rank hook to take the fly under. The type of dressing is to be found applied to all his patterns in Webster's " Angler and the Loop Rod."

Whether it was because I had faith in my

medicine, or whether any other cause was at work, I know not, but the experiment was, despite some misses due to failure to judge the right moment to pull home the hook, an immediate success.

Bulging trout are bold feeders, and seem to mind being cast over less than do those which are taking surface food; but they are much more difficult to cover accurately, because they rush from side to side and up and down, and the odds are that, if you cast to one spot, the trout is careering off in pursuit of a nymph to right or left of it. But once the trout sees the fly, the chances of his taking it are far better than are the chances that a surface-feeding trout will take the floating dun which covers him. The fly is allowed to drag in the stream, so as to be thoroughly wet, and is then cast upstream to the feeding fish in all respects like a floating fly, except that it is not dried or allowed to float. The weight of the reel-line will probably be enough to dry the gut, so that the risk of lining your trout is minimized, only the fly and the first link or so of gut going under before it reaches him. I found it best to tie this pattern on gut, and, dressed as described, it has been worth many a good bulger to me, apart from its value for general purposes.

Later on the value of Tup's Indispensable fished wet impressed me much, and its resemblance to a nymph induced me to give it a trial upon bulging trout. For wet-fly purposes this is as near the

dressing as I am at liberty to give: Primrose tying silk lapped down the hook from head to tail, a pale blue or creamy whisk of hen's feather as soft as possible and not long, three or four turns of coarser untwisted primrose sewing silk at the tail, body rather fat, of a mixed dubbing of a creamy pink (invented by Mr. R. S. Austin, the well-known angler and fly-dresser of Tiverton), and a soft blue dun hackle, very short in the fibre at the head, the dressing being preferably finished at the shoulder behind the hackle. When this fly is thoroughly soaked it has a wonderfully soft and translucent, insect-like effect. It proved even more successful than Greenwell's Glory, and with one or other I am almost always able to give a good account of bulgers instead of coming empty away.

OF UNDER-WATER TAKING, ITS INDICATIONS, AND THE TIME TO STRIKE.

Friends with whom I have discussed the use of the upstream wet fly on chalk streams have frequently said to me: "But how are you to know when the trout takes, and when to strike?" It is a very pertinent question, and the answer is not to be given in a word. Often the indications which bid you pull home the hook are so subtle and inconspicuous that the angler is at a loss to account for the miracle which is evidenced by his hooped rod and protesting reel, but even in the roughest

water something helps the angler to divine the moment for action. In a subsequent section, under the heading "The Grey-Brown Shadow," will be found an account of a day's sport with the wet fly in an upstream wind so rough as to throw the river into waves. The flash of the fish as it turns to take the fly may often be seen, so dimly and so momentarily as to be apt to escape notice if one does not know what to look for; but I have on several occasions even divined it through water which reflected a bright white glare, and seemed opaque to the eye. If on these occasions a hooked trout had not proved the truth of my observation, I could not have sworn to having certainly seen anything move; but there through the surface, which looked at the angle of view impenetrable to the eye, I did seem to glimpse a faint pink flash that corresponded to no movement on the surface, and there was the fish soundly hooked, and no fluke about it.

Often under an opposite bank, when the light will not permit you to see your gut or fly, you will see a trout suddenly ascending to near the top of the water, and as suddenly sinking; then, if you tighten, ten to one your hook is firmly in his jaws, and you see him shaking his head savagely at the unexpected restraint upon his liberty ere he makes his first rush.

When fish are bulging, the moment of taking the fly is generally marked by a swirl, and the

angler should strike immediately. Fortunately, a wet-fly strike, even if misconceived or mistimed, is far less likely, so long as the fish is clean missed and not lined, to alarm him than is a strike with the dry fly, because the wet fly comes out through the water at a point far below the fish instead of being drawn along the surface.

In glassy glides, which are always fast water, one either sees the fish turn to the fly, or, if the light prevents it, one sees a little crinkle, or break, work up through the water to the surface, which warns the angler to strike. Often the gut lying on the surface goes under as the fish draws in the fly, and alike in daylight and moonlight it acts as a float; and even if the fly be taken too deep below water for any other indication to be in time, it will warn the angler to attend to business. An ingenious angler, as elsewhere explained, has conceived and utilized successfully the idea of oiling his gut cast for fishing wet directly upstream in rapid water, and an excellent device it is for its occasion.

But perhaps the commonest indication of an under-water taking in water of slow or moderate pace is an almost imperceptible shallow humping of the water over the trout. It is caused by the turn of the fish as he takes the fly, and when the angler sees it it is time to fasten. If he waits until the swirl has reached and broken the surface (and it may not be violent enough to do so), he may be too late. If the fly drops directly over

the fish, that shallow hump seems often almost simultaneous with the lighting of the fly ; but if the cast be wide, your trout will not infrequently dart a yard or more to a wet fly—when for a dry fly he would do no such thing—and then the angler has a warning of the coming of the shallow hump on the surface which tells him that the iron is hot. It may be questioned, however, whether it is not more difficult to time correctly the strike for which one has had such warning than one which comes without warning.

In my experience, the trout which takes under-water is generally very soundly hooked. A trout taking floaters on the surface frequently sips them in through a narrowly-opened slit of mouth, but an under-water feeder draws in the fly by an extension of the gills which carries it in with a full gulp of water.

In the effort to divine the indications which call for striking with the wet fly I confess I find a subtle fascination and charm, and, when success attends me, a satisfaction beside which the successful hooking of a fish which rises to my floating fly seems second-rate in its sameness and comparative obviousness and monotony of achievement.

OF ROUGH WATER AND GREY-BROWN SHADOW.

It was blowing up freshly from the south-west as the train ran into Winchester one April a year or two back, and ere the water-meadows were reached

the distinct bite in the wind had given ample warning that, maugre the crisp yellow sunshine, 11.30 clanging from the cathedral spires left ample time to get down to the water-side and put rod and tackle together before the big dark olives or the smaller and rather lighter olives, which warn one to put up a Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear, put in an appearance. April was three parts through, yet the backwardness of the season made conditions correspond more nearly to three weeks earlier in the normal year.

Soon everything was in readiness, and a couple of dark Rough Olives, tied on gut, with dark starling wing, heron herl body dyed in onion dye and ribbed with fine gold wire, and hackle and whisk of ginger, lightly dyed olive, were put into the damper to soak, on the chance that the wet fly might pay better than the dry.

Noon and the quarter-past chimed from the belfry, and then a big dark olive drifted on to an eddy near by, and, lifted out on the meshes of a landing-net, was identified. The hint was enough. One of the flies in soak—tied on No. 1 hooks—was knotted on, and the surface was scanned for the first dimple. Presently it was located—such a tiny, infinitesimal, dacelike dimple, hinting rather than proving the movement of a trout. It was hardly noticeable in the turmoil made by the strong ruffle of the upstream wind against the somewhat full current of the stream. It was

rather far across for accurate casting in such a wind, and presently a sudden gust slammed the line down upon the spot with such a splash as no self-respecting trout could be expected to endure.

A movement upstream was prescribed by the conditions, and presently another dimple like the last was spotted in a more favourable position. It was repeated after an interval, but no fly was to be seen on the surface ; so, without an attempt at drying, the Rough Olive was despatched on his mission, and lit a foot or so above the spot. Again, and once more, it did so, and then there was a hint of a grey-brown flicker in the hollow of a wave. By instinct rather than reason the hand went up, and the arch of the rod showed that the steel had gone home. In due course the trout—a fish of fourteen inches—was landed, and the angler proceeded upward.

He soon found, however, that to reach and cover the trout satisfactorily it behoved him to cross, and tackle them from the other side, and he made his way to the footbridge. On the way down, on the main stream he saw another hint of a rise in midstream, where the waves were highest. The wind served him well, and the fly was over the trout in no time. For four or five casts there was no response ; then again that grey-brown shadow for a moment in the trough of a wave, mounting rod, a screaming reel, and a vigorous trout was battling for his life.

Arrived presently at the desired spot, the wet Rough Olive was taken off and a dry-fly pattern mounted and duly oiled, and offered to three fish in succession, with the result that they all went down. Then back once more to the wet-fly, and thrice more ere 1.30 struck there was the faint flash of grey-brown under water, the same instinctive response, a spirited battle for life (successful in one instance), and then the rise petered out and not a fish was stirring. And though at 2.30 a strong rise of the smaller olive came on, and lasted till 4.30, keeping hundreds of swallows and martins busy, yet not another fish put up a neb. Perhaps it was because the sun had gone in.

There are those who wax indignant at the use of the wet fly on dry-fly waters. Yet it has a special fascination. The indications which tell your dry-fly angler when to strike are clear and unmistakable, but those which bid a wet-fly man raise his rod-point and draw in the steel are frequently so subtle, so evanescent and impalpable to the senses, that, when the bending rod assures him that he has divined aright, he feels an ecstasy as though he had performed a miracle each time.

CHAPTER IV

SUPPLEMENTARY IN THE MATTER OF FLIES

OF WET-FLY DRESSINGS FOR CHALK STREAMS.

ASSUMING that we have made up our minds to test the wet fly upon chalk streams, it must be taken as an axiom that the ordinary patterns of the dry fly will not do. They are built to dry and to float. The patterns required must be built to soak and to sink. Therefore bodies and hackles which throw the water must be rejected in favour of bodies and hackles which take up the water or readily enter it. So dubbed bodies in place of quills, hen hackles in place of cock's, and of these a minimum of turns in place of a maximum; and if whisks are used, they, too, must be soft and soppy. For the same reason, wing material, if employed, should be so arranged as to take up the maximum of water, and to let it go as unwillingly as possible. Furthermore, the bulk of material in proportion to the hook metal must be reduced as far as possible.

Given these requirements, let us look around, as I did, among all the various systems of wet-fly

dressing in use, from John o' Groat's to Land's End, and see what features we ought to borrow from them. If we make up our minds, as I think we shall, that it is desirable to expose the body of our fly freely, we shall not adopt any system which lays the wings low over the back of the fly, that type being designed to secure what is called "a good entry" for a dragging fly, and we have nothing to do with dragging flies or any form of river raking or dredging, or with any flies which, like the Devonshire types, carry superabundance of bright cock's hackles. So we are limited to the systems which dress their flies with upright wings, like the Tweed and Clyde types, and to the soft hackled Yorkshire style.

The conditions, however, of our waters confine us to tiny patterns—Nos. 0 and 00 hooks in the vast majority of cases, and occasionally No. 1—and the supply of tiny soft absorbent hackles from birds other than poultry, sufficiently small to leave the body well exposed, is hardly to be had. So, taking one consideration with another, it would seem that the Tweed and Clyde patterns, being used on a broad and in many places equably-flowing river, will have advantages enough to invite a trial.

Now, what are the features of the Tweed and Clyde patterns? First there is the spare body, dressed with tying silk only, with or without wire ribbing, or lightly dubbed with soft fur, making

an absorbent dubbing ; then a small and lightly-dressed soft hackle, two turns at the outside, close up behind a pair of wings tied in a bunch, and either left single or, preferably for our purposes, split in equal portions, and divided with the figure-of-eight application of the tying silk behind the wings and in front of the head, the whole tied on a rank, and not too light, round-bend hook.

It will be suggested that the trout does not see the winged dun under water. That is approximately, though not quite absolutely, true ; but for all that, being in some respects rather a stupid person, if size and colour are right, he will not make much bones of the position of the fly with reference to the surface being incorrect. It might be supposed, again, that a hackled pattern would better suggest the nymph stage than a winged pattern. This may be true, but the theory has yet to be worked out in much detail before one can dogmatize about it. Elsewhere my preliminary efforts in this direction are described. Here I could say that the wings built up of a length of feather rolled into a bunch have the advantage of taking up a lot of water, and not releasing it readily ; and they also assist to let the fly down more lightly on the water than so lightly dressed a fly would fall but for the wings. To let a hackled fly down as lightly, one would need a lighter wire and a larger hackle. The wings also

help the fly to swim correctly in the water, with the weight of the straight, unsnecked, round-bend hook as the counterpoise to the parachute action of the wings.

My own belief is that wet flies tied on gut swim better and hook better than those tied on eyed hooks. As the drying action of casting is reduced to a minimum, they are not so ready to go at the neck as when used as dry flies ; but if the angler prefers it, there is no reason why he should not use eyed hooks, though snecked bends of any kind and upturned eyes are deprecated. Down-eyed hooks, round, unsnecked, square-bend, and Limerick, in the order named, are recommended.

When immediate sinking in rather fast water is required, additional weight can be got by tying on a second hook, and making the fly what is technically known as a "double." These are more easily tied on gut than on eyed hooks, though there is a maker who supplies eyed hooks for doubles in sizes Nos. 1, 0, and 00, one packet containing the eyed hook, and the other the shorter-shanked companion hook to be lashed on. In either case the hooks have to be separated with the thumb-nail, so as to stand at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees before using. Lest it should be suggested that these double hooks, fished wet, lend themselves to a form of snatching, let me say that I can only recall a single instance of a trout being hooked on a wet double otherwise than fairly in

the mouth, and in the course of my experiments I have given them an extensive trial.

The range of wet-fly patterns required is not extensive. I have found the following serve all practical purposes :

1. Rough Olive.

Wings : Darkest starling.
Body : Heron herl from wing feather dyed brown olive, and ribbed with fine gold wire.
Legs : Dirty brown-olive hen hackle, with dark centre and yellowish-brown points.
Hook : No. 1.

2. Greenwell's Glory.

Wings : Hen blackbird, dark starling, medium starling, or light starling (lighter as season advances).
Body : Primrose or yellow tying silk, more or less waxed (lighter as season advances), ribbed with fine gold wire.
Legs : Dark furnace hackle ; black centre, with cinnamon points, to medium honey dun (lighter as season advances).
Hook : Nos. 1, 0, or 00.

3. Blue Dun.

Wings : Snipe.
Body : Water-rat on primrose or yellow tying silk. Vary body by dressing with undyed heron's herl from the wing, and ribbing with fine gold or silver wire.
Legs : Medium blue hen.
Hook : No. 1 or 0.

4. Iron Blue.

Wings : Tomtit's tail.
Body : Mole's fur on claret tying silk.
Legs : Honey dun hen with red points.
Hook : No. 0 or 00.

5. Watery Dun.

Wings: Palest starling.
Body: Hare's poll or buff opossum on primrose tying silk.
Legs: Ginger hen's hackle.
Hook: No. 00.

6. Hare's Ear.

Wings: Dark or medium starling.
Body: Hare's fur from lobe at root of ear; rib narrowest gold tinsel or fine gold wire.
Legs: A few fibres picked out or placed between the strands of the silk and spun.
Hook: No. 1 or 0.

7. Black Gnat.

Wings: Palest snipe rolled and reversed.
Body: Black tying silk with two turns of black ostrich herl or knob of black silk at shoulder.
Legs: Black hen or cock starling's crest, two turns at most.
Hook: No. 00.

It will be observed that hooks a size larger than those employed for floaters can often be used.

The very short range of hackled patterns is dealt with later.

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COLOUR OF TYING SILK IN DUBBED FLIES.

Years ago I spent a week upon the Teme, fishing wet, and I remember looking down one sunny morning upon my cast in shallow water, and being struck by the appearance of my Yellow Dun. The body was dubbed with primrose wool, but though, while dry or in the air, every turn of the tying silk was completely hidden, yet, looking

down upon the fly in the water, I could see every turn distinctly, and the dubbing was scarcely noticeable, and I was glad that the tying silk harmonized so perfectly with the hue of the dubbing.

The importance of the base colour of the tying silk was still more strongly brought home to me a day or two later. I had tied some imitations of a pale watery dun which was on the water with a pale starling wing, light ginger hackle and whisk, and a mixture of opossum and hare's poll for dubbing; but some I had tied with pale orange silk, and some with that rich maroon colour called Red Ant in Mr. Aldam's series of silks. The grayling took those tied with pale orange freely, but would not look at those tied with Red Ant.

It may be less material in floating flies, but for wet flies I have since always been careful to have the tying silk either harmonious with the colour of the natural subimago, or corresponding to the colour of the spinner. For instance, for an Iron Blue Dun I should use claret silk dubbed with mole's fur or water-rat; for the old-fashioned mole's fur Blue Dun, primrose to heighten the olive effect in the dark blue; primrose silk also for a Hare's Ear; in the Willow-Fly, orange silk under the mole's fur or water-rat; in the Grannom, green very darkly waxed, or black; and so on. The fact is that the transparency of fur and feather is marvellous. A starling's wing looks much denser than

a dun's, but place it over print, and you can read every word through; and fur is practically as transparent when wet.

OF THE IMITATION OF NYMPHS, CADDIS, ALDER LARVÆ, AND SHRIMPS.

For some time after my introduction to Tup's Indispensable I used it only as a dry fly, but one July I put it over a fish without avail, and cast it a second time without drying it. It was dressed with a soft hackle, and at once went under, and the trout turned at it and missed. Again I cast, and again the trout missed, to fasten soundly at the next offer. It was a discovery for me, and I tried the pattern wet over a number of fish on the same shallow, with most satisfactory results. I thus satisfied myself that Tup's Indispensable could be used as a wet fly; and, indeed, when soaked its colours merge and blend so beautifully that it is hardly singular; and it was a remarkable imitation of a nymph I got from a trout's mouth.

The next step was to try it on bulging fish, and to my great delight I found it even more attractive than Greenwell's Glory. It was the foundation of a small range of nymph patterns, but for under-water feeders, whether bulging or otherwise, I seldom need anything but Tup's Indispensable, dressed with a very short, soft henny hackle in place of the bright honey or rusty dun used for the floating pattern. The next I tried was a Blue-

winged Olive. There was a hatch of this pernicious insect one afternoon. The floating pattern is always a failure with me, and in anticipation I had tied some nymphs of appropriate colour of body, and hackled with a single turn of the tiniest blue hackle of the merlin. It enabled me to get two or three excellent trout which were taking blue-winged olive nymphs greedily under the opposite bank, and which, or rather the first of which, like their predecessors, had refused to respond to a floating imitation. The body was a mixture of medium olive seal's fur and bear's hair close to the skin, tied with primrose silk, the whisk being short and soft, from the spade-shaped feather found on the shoulder of a blue dun cock.

Another pattern, successful in the last two months of the season, is dressed with a very short palish-blue dun or honey dun hen's hackle, a body of hare's poll tied on pale primrose silk, with or without a small gold tag and palest ginger whisks. But it is evident that on this subject I am only at the beginning of inquiry. Of course there is nothing very new in the idea of imitating nymphs. The half stone is just a nymph generally ruined by over-hackling.

In July, 1908, I caught an Itchen fish one afternoon, and on examining his mouth I found a dark olive nymph. My fly-dressing materials were with me, and I found I had a seal's fur which, with a small admixture of bear's hair, dark

brown and woolly, from close to the skin, enabled me to reproduce exactly the colours of the natural insect. I dressed the imitation with short, soft, dark blue whisks, body of the mixed dubbing tied with well-waxed bright yellow silk, and bunched at the shoulder to suggest wing-cases, the lower part of the body being ribbed with fine gold wire. Two turns of a very short, dark rusty dun hackle completed the imitation, much to my satisfaction.

Apparently it was no less agreeable to the trout, for, beginning to fish next morning at ten o'clock, I found six fish rising in a shallow. I began with a small Red Sedge, as no dun was yet on the water, and missed several of them. Then, putting up Pope's Green Nondescript, I again missed three fish in succession. I then bethought myself of my nymph, and, knotting it on, in a few minutes I had five of the six fish, and had lost the other. I then found a trout feeding in a run, evidently under water. I made a miscast at him, and he came a yard across to take the nymph, but did not take a good hold, for I lost him, only to secure a better fish a few moments later. It then came on to blow and pelt with rain in such sort as to render it no sort of pleasure to continue fishing, and I knocked off at eleven o'clock, with three brace as the result of an hour's fishing.

I have made me a shallow spoon-shaped net of butterfly-net material to attach to the ring of my

landing-net. It has the advantage of taking anything which comes down the stream, whether on or under the surface, and its practical use demonstrates itself in more ways than one. For instance, in September, 1909, I went down to the river about 9.30, and, having put my rod together, sank my net in the water, and watched for what came down. There were a number of tiny diptera, but no trace of dun or nymph. I therefore concluded that it would be some time before the trout would be lined up under the banks, and that I could safely go away for an hour, and try certain carriers where the feeding of fish is not dependent on the rise. I did this, and put in over an hour's exciting, if not very remunerative, sport before returning to the main river. The rise came on about 11.30. But for my net I might have wasted all the time on the bank, instead of conducting a siege of three very handsome trout, and bringing up two of them.

On occasion I have found a Dotterel dun tied with yellow tying silk on a No. 00 hook, and hackled with the tiniest dotterel hackle, after the manner of Stewart (*i.e.*, not hackled all at the head, but palmer-wise for halfway down the short body), quite remunerative fished wet. This, I imagine, is taken for a dun emerging.

But it is not only duns whose nymphal stages may be imitated. I borrowed of Mr. Martin E. Mosely, of the Fly-fishers' Club, a tube con-

taining some nearly full-grown larvæ of the alder, and although he assured me that they were always in the mud, and never seen by the trout, I made a sort of imitation of them which rather pleased me, and I tried it in Germany in mid-May. Whether the trout saw or did not see the natural insect in that stage I don't pretend to know, but they took the imitation with such avidity that I speedily wore out my three specimens. They were only made as an experiment, and I tried no more, as I felt qualms in my mind as to whether it was quite the game to imitate this insect in this stage, any more than it would be to fish an imitation of the caddis. I am therefore not giving my recipe. Nor do I give that for making a caddis or gentle which I once tried, with mad success for a few minutes, and gave up, conscience-stricken.

I was at one time greatly interested in an attempt to imitate the fresh-water shrimp, and I tied a variety of patterns, including several with backs of quill of some small bird dyed greenish-olive, and ribbed firmly while wet and impressionable with silk or gold wire; but somehow I never used or attempted to use any one of them. I, however, gave one to an acquaintance, and he tied it on, and, standing on a footbridge, cast it downstream over some trout which were reputed uncatchably shy. At the first cast a big fish rushed at the shrimp, slashed it, and went off leaving the one-time owner lamenting.

CHAPTER V

SPECIAL CONDITIONS AND WET-FLY SOLUTIONS

NERVES.

YEARS ago, long ere the spirit of revolt was in me, when I followed as closely as I knew how the maxims of the apostles of the dry fly, and knew no other method for chalk streams, I suffered many blank days and much depression from a state of weather and light which must be familiar to all chalk-stream anglers—the more particularly because the "d——d good-natured" and sympathetic friend who knows nothing of the subject picks it out to say knowingly: "What a beautiful day for fishing!" It is clouded, dull, leaden, overhung, and the reflected light on the water is a dead milk-and-watery white; while, looking down into its depths, one sees everything with a deadly and crystalline clearness. There is no hint of thunder about, but on such days the trout are all nerves. Never are they so difficult to approach, never are they so ready to dart off with that torpedo wave. And if one finds a rising fish, and puts a dry fly over him, even if he bolts not, he rises no more.

But at length there came a day when my first timid experiments in the fishing of chalk streams with the wet fly had proved encouraging enough to lead to my having a small stock of wet-fly patterns for chalk-stream fishing. It was a bad sample of those days when the nerves of trout seemed all on the jump, and I had fished from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. without so much as a rise. It was not that the fish were not rising. On the contrary, they rose very well—not very much, perhaps, but the best days are often those when the rise is moderate. But this day every fish I cast to went down at once, and too often I saw that detestable torpedo wave, sometimes at the approach, and more frequently at the first cast.

Soon after three I tied on a Tup's Indispensable dressed on gut, and crawled carefully to within a long cast of a trout which rose at infrequent intervals in a narrow side-stream under the opposite side. My line trailed on the water as I approached, and I made the minimum of effort to dry the fly ere I delivered it, so as to attract as little attention as possible to my movements. So it came about that the fly, when it lit a yard or more to the left of and above the trout—it was a bad cast as regards direction—went immediately under. For the *n*th time that day I saw that torpedo wave as the fish darted through the shallow water. I rose with a sigh, but as I did so my rod was a hoop, and the reel screeched; for the trout's dart

had been *at* the fly, not from it, and it had gone a full yard or more to fetch it. He was just short of one and three-quarter pounds. Before four o'clock I had another brace by the same method. They were not easy, and I did not get every fish I tried, or even many; but I got some where with the dry fly I should assuredly have gone on getting none, and the trout stood to be cast to in a way they would not that day to the dry fly.

It is true enough that there are days and times when the dry fly will beat the wet fly hollow, but there are days when the converse is the case, and from subsequent experience I can recommend the trial of the wet fly on those dull, nervy days of milk-and-watery glare.

OF THE TROUT OF GLASSY GLIDES.

There are places on most rivers where the water comes swiftly and in solid volume down a slope too slight in the incline to create a fall, too short to create a rapid or stickle, and too smooth to cause a broken surface, yet with a rapid run below. The result is a glassy glide, gin-clear, with an air of unusual smoothness, and such a pace that there is an immediate drag upon any floating fly which is laid upon the current. Often some of the handsomest and best fighting trout in the river are to be found in such places, where their blood is constantly refreshed by the highly oxygenated water, their health and energy kept up to the

mark by the need of contending against its swiftness, and the inducement to so contend is present in the plentiful supply of food brought down by the current.

Such a glide do I know well, with some excellent fish always showing there, but never breaking the surface; and for years I found them impregnable, for the simple reason that, if one pitched a fly over their noses, it was past them before they could rise to it, and if one pitched it up enough to give the fish a chance to take it they wouldn't, because there was a prompt and streaky drag if the line were, as it could hardly help being, the least little bit across stream. Even the natural fly would sail over them unmolested.

But one day some years back, on a calm afternoon in July, with not a trout rising, I was on the Itchen, and I had crawled up some half-mile of sedgy bank in search of a feeding fish without finding one. But on the far side, in front of a certain post, the remnant of a one-time fence, I knew from experience that there was usually a fish—at any rate at feeding-time. There was nothing to suggest any particular dry fly, and on the previous afternoon—a Sunday—I had spent a pleasant twenty minutes watching a fish in front of the stump taking something under water with a sort of porpoise roll. It therefore occurred to me to put up one of those little Greenwell's Glories, dressed by Forrest of Kelso on pairs

of No. 00 hooks to gut, with which the name of Mr. Ewen M. Tod is associated. I had bought them in the previous spring to experiment upon bulging trout. These flies are known as "doubles," and are not ready floaters. One puts a thumb-nail between the barb, and forces them apart till the two hooks form an angle of 45 degrees with each other. The fly dropped a yard above the post and sank. When it should have been nearing the post, a faint swirl rising to the surface seemed a sufficient indication of a movement below to justify a raising of the rod-point, and the fish was fast. In this manner it came about that a small Greenwell's Glory on double hooks terminated the cast when the glassy glide above adverted to was reached. A trout lay out in it in position to feed, but though he moved a little from side to side, and may have been intercepting food, he made no rise. Keeping well out of sight, I dropped the Glory on the far side of and in front of the fish, and it at once went under. Again came the small disturbance welling quickly to the surface; up went my hand, and again a good trout was fast.

That afternoon I killed two and a half brace of good fish with the wet fly fished into likely places without seeing a single rise. The other three fish —but that is another story.

Since that day I have killed many a good fish in that hitherto impossible spot, and one morning

in July, 1908, I had two and a half brace in less than an hour with a wet double Tup's Indispensable out of it.

OF THE WET FLY IN POOLS, BAYS, AND EDDIES.

There is probably no problem which has filled the souls of so many dry-fly anglers with the despair attending defeat as that presented by a day when a cross-stream wind, whether up and across, down and across, or straight across, drives every dun under the opposite bank, and into little pools and eddies between the prominences on that bank, and so out of the line of the current which would otherwise carry them along. Then every big trout in the river seems to shift out of the current and into the sheltered bay or eddy, and there he sets to work collecting with busy neb the little argosies which have lost their tide, and are drifting helpless on slack water. It seems so easy to drop the fly in the right place. So it is, but if, as is many times more than probable, your cruiser is away a foot or two, or is deliberate in his movements, and does not take the fly at once, your drag has made itself painfully evident, and your fish is down for half an hour. No, on those occasions the only chance with the dry fly is to hit your fish with it on the tip of the nose at a moment when few naturals are about. Then he may snap it—but what a number of chances against its so falling !

No, here is a case in which the wet fly is clearly predicated, and it should be so dressed as to go under without the least hesitation. The advantage which the wet fly has is not that the trout is taking the nymph in preference to the floating dun, though he is probably doing that far more than is apparent, but that, whereas a drag on the surface is fatal and betrays the gut, an underwater drag is not betraying, and the movement of the fly caused by the drag may, in its beginning at any rate, be even attractive to the trout, as imparting motion suggesting life and volition to an otherwise suspicious object. The drag also serves to tighten instead of slackening the line, so that a very small strike fixes the hook.

When the trout takes a wet fly in such a position, the surface indications are by no means obvious; but if the angler be on the alert to strike when such indications come, it is wonderful how soon he can pick up the knack, and what excellent fish this method brings him. A strike which does not touch the fish, being in the nature of an underwater drawing of the fly, will often have no scaring effect upon a feeding fish, where a strike with a floating fly would send him headlong to cover.

It is difficult to pick among my recollections one instance more illustrative than another of the value of this method, but I will take an afternoon in July, 1908. It was a cold day for the time of

year, with a keen north-westerly wind across and a little down. A few little pale duns were going down, being beaten by the wind into and among the bays along the opposite bank, where they dodged in and out among the flags. Three trout, and three only, could I find moving, and they were taking every dun which went over them. I tried Little Marryat, Medium Olive, Flight's Fancy, Ginger Quill, and Red Quill, in vain. In fact I put all three down. But they meant feeding, and were soon going again. It was the last day of a seven-day visit. I had so far forty-six trout, and I wanted to round off the fifty. I put up as an experiment a tiny dotterel hackle, tied with primrose tying silk in the true Stewart style, not with the fibres radiating from the head, but palmer-wise for halfway down the body. The trout had it at the very first offer, and was duly landed. I went on to the next, and got him almost immediately. The third, for some reason, had no use for Dotterel duns, but the moment I covered him with a Tup's Indispensable he slashed it, and joined the other two in my creel. I looked in vain for a fourth, and there was no evening rise, so I had to leave off with but forty-nine of my fifty. But for the wet fly, I am convinced I should have had to content myself with the single brace which the morning rise had brought me, and that would have been a disappointing ending to a good seven days.

OF THE JUDICIOUS USE OF THE MOON.

Though blinder than the proverbial bat in any slanting light, and therefore not as fortunate as I should like to be in fishing the evening rise, and though academically of opinion that fishing should cease when the dusk no longer lets the angler discern his fly, I confess to being at least as unwilling as any better endowed with sight to leave the water-side while the trout are still busy sucking down the spinners; but there are occasions when, if the moon be up enough to cast black shadows under the banks, and I can find the suitable spot with rising fish, I envy no man his superior eyesight—mine is good enough. Let me illustrate my meaning by describing the occasion on which I made my little discovery.

It was an evening in July. I had not begun fishing before four o'clock, and the afternoon had only earned me a single trout, and he no great shakes, either. The evening rise came on, and the trout began to feed briskly; but my infirmity was against me, and I missed or misjudged several rises, and it began to look as if I were going to make nothing of my opportunity, when I came to a bend where the current swung in pitch-black shadow under the opposite bank, while between the near edge of the shadow and my bank the stream ran molten moonlight. Round the bend in the dark I could hear the trout feeding away

gaily, and the rings of their rises surged into the silver of the lighted current.

It seemed a mad thing to do, but I despatched my Tup's Indispensable to a spot in the dark as near as I could judge above the ring of a good fish. My cast lay like a hair on the surface, stretching into the dark, not too taut. Suddenly I saw my gut draw straight upon the current, the farther end disappearing under the sheen of the moonlight, and, without waiting to think, I raised my rod-point, to find myself in battle with a solid fish. Thrice in the twenty minutes the rise lasted did I repeat this experience. Each trout was soundly hooked, and a nice level lot they were, running from one and a quarter to one and a half pounds. Thus was success at the last moment pulled by a fluke out of almost certain defeat. It is not always possible to find place and light serving in this way, but if you do, make use of the moon.

THE WET-FLY OIL TIP.

In my observations upon the judicious use of the moon, I indicated the advantage to be derived, in cases where the light prevented the rise from being otherwise detected in due time, from watching the gut cast as a float signalling the taking of the fly. Indeed, it is not only by night that the cast may be watched with advantage, but often by day when casting a fly, wet or dry, but especially wet, into a bad light, while the cast or part of it may be

seen floating on a glassy piece of water. It is now some years since, in the columns of the *Fishing Gazette*, I called attention to what I described as the "wet-fly oil tip" in this connection. I take no credit for this invention. It belongs entirely to Mr. C. A. M. Skues, the secretary of the Fly-fishers' Club, and its discovery came about in this way:

We were fishing opposite banks of a German trout stream, the Erlaubnitz, and the rise of fly had petered out. The trout, which had been hovering over their pockets in the weeds and in the runs between them, had dropped out of sight, and it was obvious that it would need something to attract them more noticeable than the pale watery duns which were the staple of the season. We agreed upon Soldier Palmers tied with bright scarlet seal's fur. Presently the far bank began catching them, though he was fishing upstream wet in rather fast water. I hailed him, and he said he had paraffined his gut cast to within the last two links from the fly and watched his cast. I was not above a hint, and in a minute or two I was experiencing the benefit of the wet-fly oil tip, and we were kept busy till six o'clock brought on the usual rise of Little Pale Blue of Autumn, and a change to floating patterns. It also involved a change of cast, for a cross-stream cast with oiled gut betrays you with a vile drag. It is a disadvantage of paraffining your gut that it limits

you to one cast—viz., that directly upstream. But there are times when it is well to accept the limitation.

OF GENERALSHIP AND THE WET FLY.

There is a bend on Itchen where the water runs deep and black. Over the best of it hang three large trees, under which, if trout be rising anywhere on the river, they will be found pegging away, and often when they are moving nowhere else. The place is near the spot where anglers foregather for lunch and a pull at pipe or flask; so the fish under these trees are hammered more than a little, and their knowledge is in direct proportion to their experience. Here, too, anglers usually take apart their split canes in the evening, and, ere they do so, have one last chuck in the dusk with Sedge, Coachman, or large Red Quill at one or all of these rising trout, but it is the rarest thing for one to be caught. I have caught six of them in fifteen years. Perhaps it is because to cover them one must fish straight across from the opposite bank—no other attack is possible—and they can hardly fail to see rod and angler.

But it fell about in the year of grace 1909 that my lawful occasions took me along the right bank, on which the trees grew, past the haunt of these aggravating risers, and I took the occasion to observe. None of them were moving at the time, and the water was lower by some inches than the

normal. I looked in the place where the best of the risers was usually present when attending to business, but he was not there. Four or five yards farther upstream the bottom, from being shallow, dipped suddenly to the deep, with a sharp brown earthy edge, and there, lying in shelter from the current under the earthy ledge at the head of the hole, lay a trout which I put down at a comforting two pounds. He saw me, and slithered into his fastness, but I did not forget the hint. Many times had I cast to that trout when rising, but always under a tree some yards below. Now I would cast to him when not rising, and I would fish him in his hide. The lowest of a small cohort of ribbon-weeds craning their tips gently over the surface indicated the neighbourhood of the lip of the hole, and, scanning the opposite side carefully, I marked the exact bunch of yellow flower from behind which I ought to deliver my cast, and marked on the hither bank a bunch of purple hemlock which indicated the centre of the hole.

Later in the day from the opposite bank I sent over a wet Tup's Indispensable to the weed's edge several times without avail.

The next time I came down the fish was rising to surface food, and I left him severely alone. My time was to be when he was not rising, for no trout seems able to resist a nymph at any time, even if not feeding, and a nymph of sorts he should have. Coming back later, I found stillness reign-

ing ; so, mounting a Tup's Indispensable, I soaked it well, and flicked it over to the edge of the weeds. It lit, and went under, leaving the gut for the most part along the surface. The gut drifted down, the fly end slowly slipping under the upper film. The fly was withdrawn and the cast repeated. Once more the gut lay along the surface ; once more it slipped slowly through to a point ; then it seemed to move under with a certain decision. I raised my rod-point with a drawing action, and the trout which had defied ten thousand dry flies was on. He wasn't quite two pounds, but it doesn't matter. It was generalship which got him, which discerned that in his holt he was possibly accessible to the seductions of the casual nymph-suggesting wet fly in a way in which he was not accessible to the temptations of the too well known dry fly in the place of vantage where he daily fed.

A POTTED TROUT, AND ONE OTHER.

When the drowners are out in the water-meadows flushing the ditches till they flood the tables and drench the grasses with water seeking its way back through the herbage to the river by way of ditch, drain, and carrier, the wise old trout who know their business may be found in narrow ditches and channels down to foot-wide runnels in search of the earthworm and the miscellaneous pickings of the grasslands. Again, when July

comes round, and the season of minnowing is indicated, the big trout once more make their way, in search of minnows, into the narrower irrigation channels of the water-meadows. So ardent are they at times in pursuit of their quarry that on occasion it is possible to net them out without their becoming aware of their danger.

On one occasion I got three good trout thus from behind at one scoop of the landing-net, and turned them back into the main.

Often, if they get into a channel with a constant flow and a steady food-supply, trout will not care to drop back to the river, and will take up a position of strength, where, inaccessible to the fly of the angler, they daily increase in size and lusti-hood. Such potted fish are almost entirely sub-aqueous feeders, a floating dun rarely crossing their field of vision. They grow dark and copper-coloured, and very unlike the fish of the river from which they hail.

One such fish do I remember, who took up his holt in the eddy just above a hatch-hole, through which ran the whole of a brisk stream some two to two and a half feet wide, turning at right angles to do so, after impinging on his eddy as on a sort of water-buffer. It was not hard to approach the place without being seen, but the moment one looked over the edge his troutship would flash down through the hatch-hole and into the racing stream beneath. Several times I mounted a

Sedge, tied on a No. 2 hook attached to a strong cast, and dibbed cautiously over the edge. Once I caught a companion trout of one pound five ounces, but on all other occasions the attempt was fruitless.

Tired at length of these failures, and not pleased that such a trout as our friend of the hatch-hole eddy should give no sport to the fly, one afternoon I approached the hatch-hole from below, slid down my wide and large landing-net into the thrust of the stream, and looked suddenly over into the eddy. There was a brown flash to the hole, and next moment the trout was kicking in the net—black hogback with red copper sides and gleaming white belly, two and a half pounds, and as fat as a pig. Swiftly I conveyed him the needful fifty yards or so to a side-stream some ten or twelve yards wide, and turned him carefully loose. He made no pretence of being scared, but moved leisurely away across and up stream. I watched him cross a patch of weeds and enter a gravelled clearing, where a tidy trout lay, butt him out of it, and establish himself in his place. In a few moments he moved up into the next place, butted out the brace of trout which occupied it, and took the position of vantage. He did not remain long, but moved to the next pool, again ejecting the occupants.

Still dissatisfied, he moved higher up to where the stream was narrowed by camp-sheathing to

support a low wooden bridge over which carts pass to carry the meadow hay. Here he ejected the three or four occupants, and established himself finally, with his neb close up under the sill of the bridge—too close for a fly to be got in ahead of him—obviously with the key of the larder in his pocket; and here daily for the next five days of my stay I saw him firmly planted, but, though I plied him with Sedge, and Quill, and Tup's Indispensable, wet fly and dry fly, I never got an offer or an indication of a desire to offer from him, nor did I ever see him break the surface, and I left him *in situ* at the end of my visit.

During these five days, however, crossing from the smaller stream to the main, I saw a trout in a foot-wide runnel hovering with that quivering of the fins that indicates a willingness to feed. He was not a big fish—about one pound—but I thought it would be sport to try and cast to him and catch him in so narrow a channel, and I knelt down to deliver the fly. He saw me, however, and moved up. It was on my way 'cross meadow to the main, so I followed him till I came to the place where the runnel's water-supply issued from a pipe which entered its head, at right angles to its course, from the centre of one of the tables. The flow from the pipe had worried out a corner hole, which was wide and deep enough to admit my whole landing-net and a bit over, and I dipped it in. I saw the amber gleam of my trout as he

slashed by me and fled back down the runnel he had ascended, but wriggling in the net which I lifted was a bouncing fish, black, hogbacked, with copper sides and white belly, in first-rate fettle, and weighing better, at a guess, than one and a half pounds, evidently an old inhabitant of that corner. The main was but a few yards off, and I carefully turned in my captive.

Two days later I was fishing up the bank of the main in blazing sunshine, searching for a rising fish, but finding none, when my attention was attracted by a movement in the water close under my bank some ten or fifteen yards above the spot where I turned the trout in. I dropped my wet Greenwell's Glory a foot or so from the spot, and, answering the draw of the floating gut signalling some under-water adhesion, I tightened on a nice fish, and after the usual preliminary exhibition of coyness, emphasized by sundry jumpings, I persuaded him to come ashore. The spring-balance said one pound ten ounces. Colour, size, and shape, were identical with the trout I had turned back two days before, and though, of course, I cannot prove it, I have no doubt he was the same.

Now, why did one of these potted trout take the fly, and the other refuse? This is my theory: Both had got the exclusive habit of subaqueous feeding, but the big one had his nose in a position where it was impossible to get a wet fly to him so as to pitch above him, or even alongside of his

head, and the water was too fast for it to be worth the while of a fish of his calibre to turn and follow a mere nymph. The smaller fish was in a position to be covered, and the moment the nymph came to him under water he had it as a matter of course. Possibly, in the same position the larger trout might have done the same.

OF TWO SATURDAY AFTERNOONS.

They were consecutive. Both were in August, 1909, and the reason why they are recorded is not because of any remarkable success, but because they illustrate varying conditions on the same river, proving amenable to varying treatment.

The first found me by the water-side soon after two o'clock. The morning rise was completely over. Not even a grayling was rising. The water was deadly still. A full stream was running, because the hay-makers were in the meadows, and no water that could be kept out was being let into ditches and carriers; so it was no good exploring them for stray risers, as at other times I might have done. For some time I explored likely places under the sedges with floating flies—No. 1 Red Sedge with hare's-ear body, Red Ant, and Tup's Indispensable—but without eliciting the faintest response. Then about five o'clock I put up a wet Greenwell's Glory, and cast it upstream, wet, into every little likely pool between the bank and the weed-bed which grew intermittently a

yard or two out from the bank. The change was immediate. By six o'clock I had three and a half brace of average fish (biggest one pound ten ounces), all on the same fly. Fish would surge a yard or more to meet it, would even turn downstream and take it, though the floating fly had not moved a single one to offer. There was no evening rise.

The following Saturday I was down at the same time. There was the same faint westerly breeze, and much the same light. A few—very few—grayling were taking black gnats for a short time after my arrival, but they soon stopped entirely, and I had only one in my basket. Not a rise dimpled the surface. I continued, however, casting a Black Gnat under my own bank—the right—for some forty or fifty yards, without an offer. I had the mortification of seeing three handsome trout move out from position, and I was just about to change to a Hare's Ear Sedge when I saw a grass-moth flutter out of the sedges and across the water. As luck would have it, I had four floating Grannom in my cap, and it didn't take long to knot one on.

In a few minutes I was into a trout, which took as the fly lit. I landed him, and then another, and yet a further brace, every one of which took the Grannom without the least hesitation. Then I found myself trenching on the beat of another angler, and I bethought me that the three fish I had disturbed might be back in position; so I

turned down, and, getting below them, cast carefully to where they ought to be. I whipped one fly off; then with the new fly I rose the first of them—quite a nice fish—hooked him, and lost him after a short tussle. Examining the hook, I found it pulled out nearly straight owing to a soft wire. Whether that rattled me or not I don't know, but I left my two remaining Grannom in the other two fish successively. Having no more, I fell back on the Sedge in vain. Equally vain were Red Ant (dry) and Greenwell's Glory and Tup's Indispensable (wet), and, as there was no evening rise, I finished up with a basket of two and a half brace, which with better handling should have been four brace.

On each of these afternoons there was no rise of fish or fly; and on one nothing but a floating pattern did any good, on the other nothing but a sunk pattern.

The inference that I might have gone back blank on the first occasion but for the supplemental aid of the wet-fly method does not seem far-fetched.

CHAPTER VI

UNCLASSIFIED

OF HOVERING AND SOARING, AND OF CRUISING TROUT.

THE trout that is glued to the bottom is generally a pretty hopeless fish. He is either not willing to feed, or, being willing, his suspicions have been aroused and he has gone down. Pretty stories are told of how such fish are occasionally startled into taking by the fly being slammed down with violence on or just behind their heads, but no such instance has come within my experience.

But the trout which is hovering in mid-water or near the surface is always a hopeful subject. Anglers will tell you he is willing to feed. In my belief, he is more than that ; he is generally actively feeding—under water.

I remember a trout which lay in the same hole with six grayling. He was hovering not far below the surface, but would have nothing to say to a series of dry flies of appropriate pattern offered him ; but a wet Greenwell's Glory was too much for him, and he turned and took it first cast. He

was undoubtedly feeding on nymphs, but not over weed, and so not bulging ; yet he presented only the appearance of hovering, or, as Walton generally calls it, " soaring."

Another likely fish is the cruiser on his way to his feeding-station. If I see a wedge-shaped ripple advancing irregularly upstream, and broken at times by a dimple in the centre, I always feel hopeful, and I know that such trout are nearly always of unusual size for the water. It is, of course, difficult to place the fly exactly ; but if that difficulty is overcome, your trout will take it most unsuspiciously. The best course is to throw to one side and a little ahead of the last rise.

A more difficult proposition is the cruiser who has a small defined beat. You find him moving up the bank in such wise that every cast is short of his rise ; but suddenly, if you are not ware, you will find that he has turned and sailed down-stream to the bottom of his beat, and that your rod and line are absolutely over him. Such a trout seems always fastidious and picksome, but it is all the more gratifying to circumvent him. He is usually taking toll of insects collected in eddies, and a spinner of sorts is more likely to take him than a dun ; but he will often rush for a fly that is being withdrawn under water.

OF THE PORPOISE ROLL.

There is one peculiarly irritating kind of rise in which trout indulge. Just like porpoises, they come up, and, scarcely breaking the surface with the head, expose first the back fin and then the tail as they go down. Often of an afternoon or evening it seems as if every trout in the river were busy at this game. The difficulty is to know, on such occasions, what they are taking. "Detached Badger" (p. 119 of "Dry-Fly Fishing") suggests larvæ, but though at times I have caught fish thus rising with sunk flies, I am inclined to doubt their taking nymphs or larvæ, and to suspect spinners. This (even if the trout be taking nymphs) is not properly described as "bulging," that term being confined to the swashing rises when a fish rushes to and fro, making visible waves, ending in a boil as it turns in the act of fielding the subaqueous insect. Fortunately, this porpoise type of rise is rare, for when trout indulge in it sport is consistently bad. I have been promising myself for the last two or three seasons that, when I drop on such a rise, I will try Mr. F. M. Halford's spent spinner patterns, but in an average number of days' fishing I have failed to drop on an occasion when the trout have been thus rising.

CHAPTER VII

SUNDRY CONSIDERATIONS

OF THE RELATION OF PATTERN TO THE POSITION OF TROUT, AND HEREIN OF THE TAKING OFF OF WARY WILLY.

It is perhaps a small matter which is treated under this head, but anything which helps the angler to a correct selection of fly is so much to the good, and the point I want to make here is that the haunt of a fish is an item to be taken note of in deciding what items to put upon the menu to be offered for his selection. For instance, if your trout be in position in the middle of a fairly wide stream, and that be his habitual post, it is practically little good giving him an imitation of any insect which haunts the bank only, such as alder in its season, sedge, grass-moth, or willow-fly, which, on the other hand, may be tried in their season, with every prospect of success, upon fish under the banks.

Well do I remember how marked this rule was in its application on a day in September, 1903, on a German limestone river. In the middle the

willow-fly, which was out in quantity that day, was no good. The trout wanted duns, and willow-flies were no use to them, or probably there, away from the banks, were practically unknown; but under the alder and willow-fringed banks on either side the trout took the spent willow-fly freely, and, of thirty-seven trout, no less than thirty-four fell that day to the willow-fly under the banks, but not one from mid-river. Many a time the trout will take a sedge or an imitation of the grass-moth under the banks when quite shy of them in midstream. In connection with this I may record an incident which is framed in my mind as the strange disappearance of Wary Willy.

Wary Willy was almost a public character. He inhabited a club water not far from Winchester, and was always at his post when duty called. But he was of an obliging turn of mind, and always ready to show sport to the new-comer who might be tempted to put a fly over him. Yet it was not for nothing that he had earned his name, for, though many had risen him, none was recorded as having hooked him. His holt was under a grassy bank (right of the river), about three yards above the spot where a willow stump extended a solitary branch at right angles to the current, a foot above and about two yards out into the stream, so that any angler who paid his respects to William had to send his invitation across the willow-bough, a state of things which led to difficulties and language for the

angler, and to an amused retreat on the part of Willy. Yet a short time later he would be back at his post, adding to his collection of the Ephemeridæ with undiminished zest.

I was not a member of the club, but I paid a visit to a friend who had a rod, and he very good-naturedly insisted on my trying his nine-foot Leonard over Wary Willy, and he brought me to the place. I had no tackle with me, so I had to use my friend's floating flies. The wind was light and in the right direction, and I got my fly over the branch nicely and covered him several times, and as I let my reel-line drop on the water below the branch the current carried my fly back successfully several times; but at length I was hung up, and when I tried to release myself Willy had business elsewhere.

On this water the club members and the keepers said that sedges were no use. It was a dun and spinner water only. So when in the afternoon I met the head-keeper, and saw a small Red Sedge in his cap, I made no bones of asking for it, as it was of no use. Borrowing the Leonard once more, I tied on the Red Sedge, and stole up cautiously to Willy's abode. But just ere I got to position a fish rose to the right of his place, about three yards out from the bank. I did not wish him to scare Willy, so, to get him out of the way first, I dropped the sedge upon his nose, and he had it immediately. He

was very indignant at the imposition that had been put upon him, and turned several somersaults in the air, and altogether put up quite a good fight for a fish of his ounces, which numbered twenty-five. I had, however, steered him carefully, so that his antics should not disturb William, and I approached that worthy's holt with a modest confidence that William stood in the way of getting a surprise. But William was not there. William never came back. He couldn't. He was dead, and in my friend's landing-net. But it was several days before remorse began to work in me, for it was not till a week or so later that my friend told me of the disappearance of Wary Willy. But Willy had always been fished with duns. He knew all the patterns of Holland and Chalkley and Ogden Smith, but never had he had cause to suspect the genuineness of a sedge—and so good-bye Willy!

OF THE USE OF SPINNERS DURING THE RISE OF DUNS, AND HEREIN OF THE VAGARIES OF THE BLUE-WINGED OLIVE.

"The Red Quill," says Mr. F. M. Halford, "is one of the sheet-anchors of the dry-fly fisherman on a strange river when in doubt." Never was a truer word spoken. Mr. Englefield of Winchester, I believe, conducted the experiment of confining himself to the Red Quill (in a variety of sizes and shades, and with and without the addition of gold and silver tags) for a whole season, and did as

well with the one fly as in other seasons with a larger selection. And it is a remarkable fact that the Red Quill, bearing more resemblance to a Red Spinner than to a dun, will frequently kill during a rise of duns as well as, or better than, quite a good imitation of the dun itself. It will also be found that during the rise of any kind of dun its spinner will often take as well as, if not better than, the subimago pattern. For instance, a Red Spinner during a rise of olives, a Claret Spinner when the iron-blue dun is on, and a Sherry Spinner when the blue-winged olive is on.

All the spinners do not die and fall spent on the water over night. Some come on to the water in the cool of the early morning, and if the angler tries in the hot weather for an early morning trout, the spinner may be commended to him as giving him his best chance, so far as floating patterns are concerned. And when, before the rise comes on, an odd fish or so may be found in position putting up occasionally at something, spinners may legitimately be suspected. Therefore it may be that, when the rise comes on, the memory of a recent acquaintance with more delicious morsels than the current duns leads to a readiness on his part to absorb the floating imitation spinner.

The blue-winged olive is a large and handsome fly, and its hatch is usually an evening matter, though I have seen it at all hours of the day. But when it is on, and there are other duns at the same

time, it is always possible to distinguish the trout which are taking the blue-winged olive by the curious shape of the boil they make in taking it; a kidney-shaped boil, with two distinct whorls right and left. And if the angler is provided with Orange Quills on No. 1 hooks, and will pick out these fish, he may count on sport worth remembering, though possibly not a spinner may be on the water at the time. Curiously enough, such a thing as a good imitation of the blue-winged olive in the subimago form has yet to be invented. Patterns are tied which will kill an occasional trout, but the Orange Quill, if the rise be anything like a good one, means three or four brace, and probably all big fish.

One evening, June 24 in 1908, I ran down to Winchester by the 6.50 train to see Eton *v.* Winchester on the next day, and I got down there about eight o'clock. I had not meant to fish overnight, but I thought there was time for a cast before the dusk drew in, and I picked up a nine-foot Leonard and a landing-net, stuck a damper with a cast in my pocket, and a small box of flies, and got down to a broad shallow. I found several fish rising, and at once diagnosed the blue-winged olive. So I tied on a large Orange Quill and cast to the nearest. Up he came, and was off with a flounder. Without losing a moment, I covered the next with the ensuing cast. The same thing occurred, and I promptly dropped my

next cast a yard to the right over the third fish. He, too, came up and fastened. He went straight to weed, but, holding him quite lightly, I soon had the satisfaction of feeling him beat himself free of the weeds, and presently I netted him out. The fly was quite soaked, and I tried to change it, but it was too dark, and so I knocked off, having risen three trout to the Orange Quill in three successive casts.

Some years ago I dressed for my friend, M. Louis Bouglé, of Paris and the Fly-fishers' Club, a winged imitation of the blue-winged olive, which is at certain seasons almost the only dun on the chalk streams of Normandy, and he can kill an occasional fish on it. Its dressing is immaterial, for I never could do any good with it myself; but one evening I was fishing the Varennes with M. Bouglé, when there came on a good fall of blue-winged olive spinner. My friend caught a trout with his pattern, and by the aid of a spoon I got from its stomach, and turned into a glass, three large greenish-amber spinners, with the distinctive three setæ; and next morning in a capital light I tied an imitation of these insects, spent-gnat-wise, with seal's fur body of palish yellow-green olive of appropriate mixture of furs. Next evening we each got fish with these imitations, M. Bouglé more than I, and I have always been promising myself that I will put it up one blue-winged olive evening on the Hampshire rivers; but

when the occasion has come, and that distinctive rise is seen, I have never been able to resist taking the Orange Quill rather than the spent olive pattern out of the box where they repose together. It is hard to resist three or four brace.

OF GENERAL FEEDERS, AND HEREIN OF THE UNDOING OF AUNT SALLY.

There are places in most rivers—generally, I think, about the spots most frequented by man—where trout establish themselves, which seem, though willing enough to take duns as they come, to be independent of them as a staple food, and to take gaily every day and all day long, and often far into the night, whatever fly-food comes along, always excepting, *bien entendu*, the angler's flies, however delicately offered. Such trout are readily put off their feed, but not for long, and the angler, returning to the spot after a short absence, may make up his mind to find his friend back in position, pegging away as freely as ever. Everyone has a chuck at these fish—no one can resist them; but it is a rare thing for one to be caught — and the Coachman may account for a few. A strong ruffle in the water *may* enable you to take one unaware, but, generally speaking, the ordinary tactics, whether dry-fly or wet, are thrown away on such fish, and the only chance is to fall back on some-

thing exceptional either in lure or in method of attack, or both.

Followeth the example of

The Undoing of Aunt Sally.

She was called Aunt Sally because everyone felt bound to have a shy at her. Her coign of vantage was near the bottom of the water, where the fishery begins, and her irritating "pip, pip," as she took fly after fly in the culvert that was her home was too much for the nerves of nine anglers out of ten, so that the absurdest efforts to circumvent her were made daily—efforts to float a dry upwinged dun down the culvert from the top: result, immediate and irremediable drag; efforts to flick a fly upstream to her in the culvert from below: result, broken rod-tops, barbless hooks, flies flicked off against the brickwork, and other disasters, leading to profanity.

The *locus in quo* was a stream in the South of England, flowing some fifteen yards or so wide at a good even pace, with a nice purl on it, down to and past a deep hole used for bathing by the farmers' lads. From this hole, a culvert in the left bank, a yard wide and, say, four yards long, diverts a considerable body of the stream into a new channel, to drive a mill in the town below. This was the fastness in which Aunt Sally had taken up her abode, and throughout the spring and summer had defied all efforts to dislodge her.

It was my first visit to the stream that year, and from 9 a.m. till 3 p.m. on an August day I had worked away for meagre results. There was no rise of fly after ten o'clock, and a strong rise of water-rats. Three trout had I turned over, and one of one pound two ounces reposed in my bag. I had not seen a rising fish for hours, when, weary and disappointed, I drifted down the right bank to the bottom of the fishery, and sat down to rest on the steps which are set in the hole to assist bathers in clambering out.

"Pip!" I heard coming from somewhere. I looked upstream, I looked under my own bank, but not a sign of a ring was to be seen. "Pip, pip!" again. At last, leaning low and looking through the culvert, I saw, some two yards down, what I took to be a dimple of a rising fish. Watching a few moments, I saw it repeated, and my spirits revived. My point was fine, so I took it off and knotted on a yard of sound Refina gut, and ended it with a brown beetle with peacock's herl body and red legs. I soaked him well, so that there should be no drag on the surface, and then, getting my length for the other side, let the fly and gut drag in the stream till the moment I made my cast. Fly and gut together struck the brick face of the culvert, and fell in a heap at the mouth. Instantly the current caught the fly and gut, and extended it down the culvert. Almost at the same moment the current of the main stream,

across which my reel-line lay, began to drag upon it, and completed the extension of the gut by the time the beetle had run a short two yards down the culvert. At once it began to drag back. This was too much for Aunt Sally — to have that beetle scuttling from her when it was almost in her mouth. She came at it, and in a flash secured it ere it could escape from the culvert; and before she could turn she was skull-dragged out of her fastness and turned down into the stream below. She made a determined fight for it, but she was very soundly hooked, and I gave no needless law, so that her fifteen inches were soon laid out upon the grass. Not knowing of her fame, I was quite content with her one pound eleven ounces; but an angler who told me of her reputation said she had always been put down as a much bigger fish. An hour later I looked down the culvert again, but the water had dropped some inches, and there was not enough current through the culvert to make it fishable. I had hit the happy moment for the undoing of Aunt Sally.

OF ATTENTION TO CASUAL FEEDERS.

The happening fish is a godsend to the angler whom time or trains, failure to find the taking fly, or other act of God or the King's enemies, have prevented from making his basket during the main hatch of duns. By the "happening fish" is to be understood, not the chance riser to a chance

cast, but the trout which, by reason of a larger stomach capacity, misfortune of position, shortage of fly, disinclination for the society of tailers, or the pursuit of the succulent shrimp, or neglect of his opportunities during the main rise, is left hungry, or at least hungry enough not to have left off feeding after—often long after—the main rise has petered out; and also the trout whose hearty appetite ranges him under the bank in advance of the rise, in a state of impatience for his meal, which leads him to sample such *hors d'œuvres* as the stream may bring his way. For reasons which shall be made apparent, both of these classes of trout offer themselves an easier prey to the angler than the trout who is busy with a steady diet of hatching duns. It is doubtful whether the advice often tendered to the over-eager, to allow the rising trout to get well set at the wicket, is really sound, as, by the time he is well set, his appreciation of what is offered him has become greatly sharpened by a prolonged experience of it as it should be, and he is as likely as not to refuse anything that does not appeal to him as being identical with the natural insect he has been absorbing so much of; and I know no more likely fish to take, if you get your fly to him right, than a trout which is cruising up to his feeding-ground, picking a fly or two on the way. Freely I confess that whole rises have passed me too many a time without my having

succeeded in ascertaining what the trout would take, and on such days — and again on days when trains have borne me to the water too late for the morning rise—I might frequently, but for my friend the casual feeder, have brought home a toom creel.

The places where the casual feeder is to be found at home are various ; but, speaking generally, the casual feeder's position depends on the nature of the fare which the time of day affords him, and the odds are long that from the end of May, when the first of the sedges (the so-called Welshman's Button—the "Dun Cut" of the fathers of angling) comes upon the water, that position will be found under the banks where sedge-flies and other bank insects most do congregate, and from which they venture upon the water ; at bridges where a constriction of the current concentrates the food ; at bridges where spinners are apt to dance until their dancing minutes be done, and sedges often shelter in brickwork ; at hatches where woodlice and other insects harbour in the wood, and are prone to drop into the current ; in pockets in the weeds ; and in ditches and carriers where the hatch of duns is sparse and unsatisfactory, and a trout must rely upon other resources for his daily sustenance. This may be floating or subaqueous, but is more likely in carriers and swift waters to be subaqueous, inasmuch as it is only for a brief period that a hatch

takes place; but subaqueous forms of fly-life are always about (though, no doubt, sparsely at other times than that of the rise), and experience proves that when no definite rise is in progress, no trout that is on the alert finds it easy to resist a nymph who has left his shelter. Hence, given the willingness of the trout to feed, and the absence of a steady diet of dominant attractiveness, there is every inducement for him to be of an open mind as to the provender that will seduce him.

Then there is our friend the "tailer," of whom more elsewhere.

Thus, instead of spiking his rod when the morning rise is over, and taking his Walton or his Marcus Aurelius or his Omar Khayyám from his pocket, let the wise angler concentrate on the casual feeder; and if his reward be not great, there is every chance of its being quite respectable, and he may be saved the humiliation of an empty creel.

OF THE FREQUENTATION OF DITCHES, DRAINS, AND CARRIERS.

I know of no sight more gloomy than that of a golfer painfully tramping from shot to shot. But perhaps the next gloomiest sight is the angler who, with perhaps but a single day at his disposal, lounges hour by hour by the side of the main river, waiting with such patience as he can muster for the rise which comes not. Let us suppose that

he is either unable or too magnanimous to fish the wet fly, that there are no fish lying, either visibly or inferentially, in convenient places under his own bank, so that they could be fished to with a dry sedge or a Red Quill. Let him come with me, and we will pull some sport out of adverse conditions. Let us begin here, where this hatch is letting a goodly supply of water into this carrier for the watering of the meadows. Be it known unto you, O angler, that the trout of ditches and carriers are far less affected by the rise of duns, and far readier to feed at all times or any time, than those fish of the main river. Here our choice is to fish either a sunk fly, suggesting a nymph (for here an upwinged dun can hardly get through undrowned), a floating fly resembling one of the sedges which dodge about the camp-sheathing or a good-sized Wickham's Fancy. Search all the tail of the run carefully with one or the other of these patterns, and it shall go hard with you if you do not get a chance, at any rate, from a passable fish—possibly more than one.

A little lower down the carrier runs through a culvert, and, if the hay-makers have not got him out, one is likely to find quite a respectable trout just below the arch, and he is to be had if you fish him right. Farther down there is a low wood bridge, through which the stream flows briskly, and below this there are usually two or three feeding fish. For some reason these are specially

sensitive to shadow. I have had many fish from this spot from both sides, but never one from the right, or west, side after two o'clock, or from the other side before two. Having fished these fish, and caught or lost or put them down, let us move over to the next piece of water. It is slow, and has little weed. If it had been a day with a ruffle of wind, or had the drowners turned a good current through, we would have fished it up yard by yard ; but to-day it is no good. But here, a bit farther on, a brisk stream runs through a little hatch, and for a hundred and fifty yards or so makes a most merry little length. Keep low in the long grass, fish it foot by foot, and, so far as you can, turn *down* all the fish you scare. If you send one up, sit down and wait. It will not be long ere the others recover their equanimity. On a good day you should get your two brace from this length, either with No. 1 Red Sedge, No. 1 Red Quill, No. 0 Pink Wickham or No. 0 Tup's Indispensable wet, or No. 0 Wickham's Fancy. Now let us wind up along another brisk little piece of water, perhaps fifteen feet wide, which races in a series of runs, and stretches right across the meadows. It is known as the Highland Burn, and it is full of sporting fish, and you must take the chance of hooking a half-pounder along with your chance of a fish nearer two pounds. And do not neglect the ditch which runs in at right angles halfway up. I have seen a past-master take no less

than three capital trout from those few yards in one day, turning each as hooked down into the Highland Burn, and killing him there.

OF THE NEGOTIATION OF TAILERS.

Authority hath it that "the best policy is, perhaps, to leave tailing fish alone"; but the busy man, who only gets an occasional day's fishing, to whom that advice is too trying and disappointing (meaning me), was recommended to try an Orange Bumble or a Furnace. With an exception I shall presently refer to, it is some years since I have had any experience of tailing trout, for an alteration in a weir has made such a difference in the pace and level of a length on the chalk stream I most do fish, that whereas in the old days the tailer used to be a common sight there, nowadays it is the greatest rarity. But in those old days the tailer was my stand-by. If—as was frequently the case—I made naught of the morning rise, I would betake me to this length and sit down gaily to the siege of each tailer in succession, with the confidence that, unless I made some mistake and scared the fish—and tailers are not too easily scared—sooner or later he was my fish. It was often later, for I had to go on casting, casting, casting, in the hope that the moment might come when my fly would be passing over the trout at the moment when his head was raised, and he was taking breath before another big go at the

shrimps and other food in the weed-beds. The frequent casting gave much opportunity for mistakes, and not infrequently I scared my fish, after wasting half an hour or more over him ; but, on the other hand, I seldom failed to secure at least one fish, and oftener a leash. The method was simplicity itself. I sat down below my fish, and dropped a Pink Wickham a yard or so above where his tail dimpled the surface, and floated it down over him quite dry. This was repeated so long as the fish was there, but if he lifted his head in time to see the fly come over him, there seemed to be some mysterious attraction in that pattern which forbade him to refuse it. Whether this is so in other waters I know not, but I often regret the obliteration of the old race of tailers. They were a great stand-by, and always put up a big battle when hooked. The size of fly was 00 for smooth water, but in a ruffle the single cipher size proved better medicine.

The single occasion above referred to was in May, 1909, in a different part of the river. The water was running thinly over a broad shallow, very full up with weed-beds, and, instead of standing nearly perpendicularly on their heads in order to tail, large numbers of trout and grayling were grubbing at an acute angle with the bottom among the weed-beds, and with violent wriggles of head and body dislodging small insects, which they pursued with rushes plainly marked upon the

surface, ending, at the moment of capture of the prey, with swirls. I did not put up a Pink Wickham, because I had another experiment to make. In the previous July I had caught three brace before eleven o'clock on a nymph imitated in olive seal's fur from one found in the mouth of a trout on the previous day, and I wanted to give it a trial here, on the chance that it might be found that it was nymphs, and not shrimps, that the tailing fish were shaking out. So, keeping the artificial nymph soaking at the end of my line in the run at my feet, I despatched it every now and then across the course of the trout, when, desisting from their grubbing, they pursued the flying quarry. It was generally the case that, by the time the fly lit, the fish was careering off in some different direction ; but several fish pursued my fly and swirled at it, and one takable trout and one short of the regulation twelve inches succeeded in taking it. It was a short and most inconclusive experiment, but, if occasion serves, it will be renewed.

OF THE FASCINATION OF BRIDGES.

Years ago, before ever I knew the Upper Itchen, there was a wooden farm bridge which crossed the main river to carry produce. Whether the bridge fell into decay through disuse and neglect consequent upon the fields on the east side being separately let to another farmer, or whether the

separate letting occurred because the bridge became dangerous, and would have cost too much to repair, anyhow, when I came first to know this particular part of the river in the early eighties, there was nothing left of the bridge except a stump or two, green with slime, brown with rot, showing just above water, or intercepting weed—just that and a band of bottom a little higher than the river-bed above and below, as if the made bottom which had carried the bridge still persisted. Even the stumps are long gone the way of all stumps, and the made bed is only just traceable if you know where to find it. But for all that, after all these years, this is the place in the river where trout are to be found feeding, if they are found feeding anywhere; and they feed in much the same way, seeming secure, yet really shy, as the trout feed under or just below all the bridges on the river. All bridge trout seem to be shy. Some bridges make shyer trout than others. I knew one—a railway-bridge on that length—under which in four-and-twenty years I never got a trout, or even a rise, for all I tried persistently, wet and dry, until 1908, and then only because on that particular day a strong ruffle of wind blew up the arch and made good big waves. Then I got a brace to a floating Tup's Indispensable, and lost another fish. Whether it is the holt into which to run at hint of danger, or the insects which haunt the woodwork, or the clear space of un-

weeded water in which to swim, or what not, bridges seem to have a special fascination for trout; and if the fly (preferably a small sedge) can be delicately dropped over the fish as if it fell from the woodwork, the chances of getting him are much increased.

Trout seem specially watchful at bridges, and, if the water be not too fast, will turn to take a fly which is aimed to hit them on the tail.

CHAPTER VIII

MAINLY TACTICAL

OF THE DELIBERATE DRAG.

Of all trials of the chalk-stream angler, perhaps drag is the worst. Yet even drag may be made use of on occasion, to add to the weight of the creel. Years back, on the Erlaubnitz in South Germany, I sat by a mill-head on a blazing and wellnigh hopeless September afternoon. The water was low, much of the head having been run off by the sawmill, and such little current as there was confined itself almost entirely to the centre. Brown and dirty-looking weeds topped the surface along my side of the head. Suddenly I detected a tiny dimple in a little spot where, among the weeds, an eighteen-inch square of clean surface showed itself. I despatched my fly—a Landrail and Hare's Ear Sedge on a No. 3 hook—and by good luck or good management it dropped neatly on the spot. I waited. Three minutes passed. Nothing happened. Then I thought to recover my fly and drop it again in the hole, but with rather less delicacy, so as to attract attention

to its fall. But first I had to recover it. I moved it gently towards the side of the hole, but I could not prevent the effect of a drag on the surface. Yet ere the fly had moved three inches a good pound-and-a-half trout had it, and, after a game of pully-hauly in the weeds, was duly brought to net. This was a limestone stream, and not a chalk stream.

But in August, 1908, I was on my way through the meadows to the main Itchen, when in a much-weed-encumbered carrier I became aware of a good trout lying in and near the head of a little pool of open water three or four yards long at most, and perhaps a third as wide. My rod and cast were ready, but no fly. So I knotted on a good big sedge—I think a No. 3 Silver Sedge. The water was glassy smooth, and the current would not have carried my fly the length of the open water in much under five minutes. I was afraid to cast above the fish, or to right or left of his head, for I knew it would send him scuttling to weed. I wanted to drop the fly just behind his eyes, but I misjudged, and it fell several inches short, almost upon his tail. I waited a moment; the trout lay still, but evidently excited. Then I remembered my German experience, and began to draw the fly along the surface. Immediately the trout turned and slashed it, and was soundly hooked. Candour compels me to admit that the gut was also smashed by a strike of unregulated

violence ; but this is entirely beside the point, for it in no sense detracts from the value of my illustration of the occasional serviceableness of the calculated drag in still waters, even with the dry fly.

My friend M. Bouglé acutely distinguishes drag of the kind here described as the drag of *déplacement*, as compared with the drag of *rétention*, which occurs on moving water.

On the Pang at Bradfield resides a blacksmith named Holloway, who is a first-rate angler, and I have seen him practise the deliberate drag on fast water with the May-fly in a manner which in other hands would send every trout scuttling to cover, but he did not put them down a bit. He ties a May-fly—not a very pretty confection, but admirably constructed for this purpose. The hackle, which is white, instead of standing out more or less at right angles to the hook-shank, is so tied as to lie almost flat upon it, and as a result the fly leaves practically no wake when it is drawn over the fish, and the movement, which he practises assiduously, far from scaring the fish, appears to be actually attractive. Yet the Pang fish are quite wary, and liberties may not be taken with them with impunity. In this case once more we have the drag of *déplacement*, but it is hard to see why it should not be just as fatal to the angler's chances as the drag of *rétention*.

IN THE GLASS EDGE.

A more unpromising May day than that I now tell of it would be hard to conceive. The wind—from the west, with a bite of north in it—blew for the most part dead across stream with strong, shuddering gusts, so violent at times as to force the angler, taken unawares, two or three steps nearer to the water's edge, and more than once nearly to precipitate him into the water between the sedgy tussocks which fringed one side of this length of Upper Itchen. On the previous day there had been a sparse skirmishing line of dark olives on the water at 10.15, covering the main advance at 11.30; but to-day 10.30, 11, 11.30, noon, and the intervening quarters, chimed from the belfry, without a fly showing on the water or in the air. At noon the sun shone out for a few moments, and made fitful reappearances at intervals till 1.30. Strolling slowly and watchfully up the bank, with an eye on the far side, the angler came upon Keeper Humphrey in attendance on another angler, and, on his advice, put up a Red Quill on a No. 0 hook, for lack of one a size larger, and, leaving the other a couple of hundred yards below, sat down to wait for the rise. At length a little upwinged dun was seen in sail in the glass edge, hugging the far bank as close as possible. For a few yards it staggered down, battered by the gale, and then slid sideways

among the flags under pressure of a stronger gust than usual, and was lost to sight. Pitiably sparse the fly were, and in half an hour not more than half a dozen came in sight. All vanished disappointingly among the flags. But at last the watcher was rewarded by seeing one disappear in the centre of a tiny widening ring, which scarcely rippled out beyond the narrow glass edge. In a moment distance was got by a trial cast a yard or two downstream, and then the Red Quill dropped perkily a foot above the spot where the dun had disappeared, and went swiftly down on the full current—so swiftly that the angler did not realize until a second too late that the same nebbed which had lain in wait for the dun had sucked in the Red Quill. The strike was just too late, and a pricked and badly scared trout dashed violently out into the stream.

In the next little bay another rising trout was located, but the violence of the wind made it necessary to cast too tight a line in order to drop the fly in the glass edge, with the result that a drag began to develop immediately, putting the trout down. A few yards higher a clump of trees made a sort of buffer of air, and the conditions were a bit easier. Yet, though the sun came out and showed the Red Quill gliding down the glass edge, the rise of the next trout was such a delicately neat movement that the angler was once again almost taken unawares. Yet this time he fastened,

and his first fish of the day, after a dumbfounded second's pause, forged upstream with a rush, tearing line from the protesting reel. He was not, however, allowed to reach his holt among the weeds, but was turned, and netted out thirty yards or so downstream, after a strenuous resistance. The hook was on the extreme edge of his upper lip, but, fortunately, had taken a beautifully firm hold. The spring-balance recorded one pound fifteen ounces—rather a disappointment, for his hogback and splendour of general condition suggested that he might, though a short sixteen inches, have topped two pounds.

A moment sufficed to knot on a fresh fly, and the very first cast into the glass edge, to a glide where a dimple betrayed a trout, produced another rise; and again the offer was accepted, and an excellent fight put up. When eventually netted out, the fish proved to be one pound nine ounces, and even handsomer and finer in condition than number one. He was hooked exactly in the same way. There was one more rise spotted, the fish risen, touched, and seen in the clearness of the glass edge to flash some yards upstream under the far bank. Then the sun went in for a spell, and all was over for the day. The other angler had a brace—two pounds ten ounces and one pound odd—caught in the same way by floating the Red Quill in the glass edge.

This was one of those rare days when the dry fly can be fished into the bays under the opposite bank.

OF THE CROSS-COUNTRY CAST.

If questioned on their favourite mode of approaching a trout, it is probable that nineteen out of every twenty chalk-stream anglers, if not a larger proportion, would plump for the right bank with the rod held over the water. It is doubtless the easiest method. It has various advantages not difficult to enumerate, but it may be gravely doubted whether it is the most effective from the point of view of catching trout. Later under the caption ("The Bank of Vantage") it is shown —with what success the reader must judge—that in most states of the wind the left bank has, contrary to general opinion (other things, of course, being equal), decided advantages over the right.

Apart from states of the wind, it must be apparent that, where the horizontal cast is used, and often where the cast is not strictly horizontal, the left bank has the advantage over the right that the rod and line are less displayed, and far less likely to alarm a wary fish under the angler's own bank than a rod held more or less over the stream; and, naturally, it is only to a fish under the angler's own bank that the cross-country cast is made.

Secondly, there is the advantage that little of the line—possibly not all of the gut, even—strikes the

water. It is enough if the drag and the recovery occur far enough below the fish not to disturb him; but if the fly be the right pattern the drag is a matter of no consequence, as the cross-country cast comes so lightly, so naturally, and with such concealment of its perils from the trout, that as frequently as not he takes the fly at the first offer.

Of course, the vegetation on the bank may be such as to render it almost impossible to deliver this cast without being hung up, but the angler should not be too ready to assume that this is so. It is wonderful how, with care, a light hand, and a little patience, the line may be recovered, and what risks may be taken with comparative impunity. It is often astonishing to see how anglers who pay largely for their fishing rights, own costly rods, reels, and lines, and make long train journeys for their fishing, will decline to tackle trout in difficult positions, because it involves the possible loss of a cast or a fly—perhaps 1s. 2½d. all told—with the odds long in favour of the loss being no more than a fly, and perhaps a point. I am ever for the adventure. The certain smash does not always come off.

But after the meadows are cut, and when the sedges are low, it is often excellent sport to beat slowly up on either bank, left or right, keeping in either case well inland—especially so on the right bank—and flicking a grass moth or a small sedge dry into every little eddy and bay, and on to

every likely spot under the bank, with never more than three feet—or four feet at the outside—of gut on the water (often not more than eighteen inches or a foot). Of course, a rod which will cast a short line accurately is indispensable. The fly lights like thistledown. On such days, if you work orthodoxly up your right bank, casting a longish line upstream, and covering the water with it, you shall not hook one fish for three which you shall take with the cross-country cast. Then, to recover it, you must either draw it slowly over the edge where the danger lies, or you must flick the line up so as to belly vertically away from you, and pick the gut and fly cleanly off the water or the herbage. And if occasionally one is hung up, what does it matter? If it be of service, the angler is not denied such relief as the golfer freely avails himself of when the deadly bunker has him for its own.

WHAT TUSSOCKS ARE FOR.

This is not a riddle. It is a speculation which many anglers have probably indulged in. Some have considered them a providential arrangement for the protection of the business of the dealer in flies and tackle, and verily they have their reasons. At one time I was of that fold, but of late years I have had glimpses of the other side of the shield, and I am beginning to realize that while tussocks may be put along river-sides as a

trial of the patience of some, yet for others they are a means of providing an occasional trout, and generally a good one, on days when disappointment is king. They are placed, in other words, for the trout to stand on the upstream side and the angler on the downstream side, the latter substantially concealed from the former. It is equally true that the former is also concealed from the latter ; but this is of little consequence if, as is commonly the case, the screen is not dense enough to hide the ring from the angler when the trout takes his fly.

But it may be said, " What is the use of the concealment if the inevitable result of casting over the tussock is to get hung up in it ?" Well, it is not the inevitable result. There are two ways of tackling a tussock. One implies the use of a short rod, or at least a rod capable of an accurate short cast. It will not do to dib. At the first glimpse of the rod-top over the tussock off goes your trout. No ; the fly must be cast, and cast so near the tussock that it drifts down to the fish just above the tussock before it is necessary to pick it up for the next cast with a forward flick. The other method is to cast over the river side of the drooping sedges of the tussock from such a distance that only the gut and a foot or two of the casting line go over the tussock, and to let the belly of the line dip in the water between you and the tussock. Then, if the fly be not taken, the angler shall see

his line coming back smoothly and at the pace of the stream over the tussock, and finally the fly shall be lifted off the surface with no disturbance, and be drawn by the current softly over the tussock, and drop on the surface on his own side, free for the next attempt.

Obviously, this latter cast is not well suited to the left bank unless the angler be left-handed, and, then, it is not suited to the right bank, unless he be ambidextrous. *Ergo*, the rod which casts a short line with delicacy and accuracy is a desideratum for this business, as for many others. A heavy rod will seldom be found to do it. When you have hooked your fish, he may be depended on to carry your line at once free of the tussock. I have never had an instance to the contrary, and I have rather an affection for the tussock cast.

OF THE ALLEGED MARCH BROWN.

Everyone who reads much angling literature must have come across ingenuous arguments on the wonderful usefulness of the March Brown even on waters, such as the chalk streams, where the natural is not found. It is so. I have found it so myself. One 6th of April some years back I reached the Wey, to find that the Grannom was well on a good week in advance of time, and that I had one imitation, and one only, in my box. To improve upon the humour of the situation, I allowed—nay, I forced—the first trout to whom

I presented it to keep it. But was I downhearted? No! I had some small floating March Browns, which, with the whisks pinched off, made quite satisfactory Grannoms and saved the situation. On other occasions I have used Grannom and March Brown indifferently to represent the grass-moths with which the meadows and banks were teeming, and they each did the job excellently and were most attractive. I have also used the March Brown as a Brown Silver Horns, and to simulate other sedges, and there is no doubt that it is an excellent fly, and, as generally tied, quite a poor imitation of the natural March Brown, and quite a passable imitation of almost anything else.

GENERAL FLIES AND FANCY FLIES.

The alleged March Brown may be called a "general fly"—*i.e.*, it is a more or less satisfactory imitation, not merely of one, but of many flies. In the same way the Red Quill is a general fly, covering not only a series of red spinners, but also probably the whirling blue dun. Tup's Indispensable used as a floater is an excellent rendering of many red spinners. The sunk variety is an efficient rendering of many nymphs. No. 1 Whitchurch is, I see, included by Mr. F. M. Halford among fancy flies; but I should venture to class it as "general," being an effective presentment of the yellow dun series of flies. Green-

well's Glory, again, is a general fly, and with its starling-winged variants it represents a series of olives, from the blue-winged olive to the iron blue (male).

It is hard to say what precisely are fancy flies, unless one defines them as flies which are not known to represent definitely any insect or class of insects. Whether Wickham's Fancy to the eye of a trout looks the gorgeous golden thing which it does to mankind it is hard to say. I have floated one on water over a mirror, and the reflected image did not look golden at all, but a pale, dim green, much like the colour seen through gold beaten so thin that it is almost transparent. The Pink Wickham may seem to the trout to be a sedge with a greenish body. The Red Tag *may* have its living prototype. The Soldier Palmer is supposed to represent the soldier beetle. But in most of these cases it is impossible to say what the artificial represents, or may represent, in life, and its attraction is apt to be that of something bright and garish which appeals to curiosity or tyranny in the trout, rather than to appetite. Indeed, why a trout should take any artificial fly is a puzzle to me. The very best are not really very like the real thing. One thing is clear: It is not form which appeals to the trout, but colour and size.

I know a skilful angler who, when he ties on a new split-winged floater, rumples and breaks up

the fibre of its wings with his fingers before using it. This he does for the excellent reason that it pays. His theory is that it lets the light through ; but form is entirely sacrificed.

It is a curious fact that, though the Test and Itchen are " by ordinar' " clear, yet double-dressed floaters can be successfully used on them, which would do little or nothing on other streams, of which the Wandle occurs to me as an example. If I had a day on the Wandle, I should take care to provide myself with single-winged patterns. Can it be that the clearness of the Test and Itchen is such that the fly looks distinct enough by reflected light, while transmitted light is necessary to render the fly noticeable on such streams as the Wandle ? In any case, when visiting a strange river, the angler should see if the fish will or will not stand double-dressed floaters, if he has a fancy for that build of fly.

CHAPTER IX

CONSIDERATIONS MORAL, TACTICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND INCIDENTAL

OF FAITH.

AMONG the many uncertainties which attend the sport of fly-fishing, there is one thing that may be laid down as certain, and that is that no consistent measure of success attends a lure, whether wet, dry, or semi-submerged, in which the angler has not faith ; and it may be shrewdly suspected that much of the ill-success which has attended the use of the wet fly upon chalk streams in the past is due to lack of confidence on the part of the angler. It has been laid down so positively by the high-priests of the dry fly that the wet fly has no chance compared with it—at any rate, on smooth water—and it has been so freely stated that crack wet-fly anglers come down to the chalk streams confident in their powers to make an exhibition of chalk-stream fish, only to retire defeated and converted, that it is little wonder that the chalk-stream angler who tries the wet fly does it half-heartedly ; and it is probable that the

North-Country man coming to practise his art upon South-Country streams, and accustomed to catch his trout in considerable numbers, soon becomes disheartened by failure to do the like on rivers where two or three brace is a good bag. Probably he casts a much shorter line than is advisable on chalk streams, and so scares off or puts down his fish, and discouragement and the sceptical attitude of his South-Country hosts and keepers knock him off his game before he has had time to adjust himself to the (to him) novel conditions.

Fishing a chalk stream with a wet fly is not quite like fishing a mountain stream or North-Country river, and it is not a game to be learnt in an hour or a day. But if the angler will fix his mind firmly on the fact that the wet fly was for centuries the only method in use on chalk streams, and that it brought excellent baskets to good anglers in the past, he may set to work with confidence that in the right conditions the wet fly will kill, and kill well, at this day, and he may set himself with equal confidence to find out for himself how it is done. And let him not be disturbed by the fact that there are days or hours when it has not a chance against the dry fly; for there are days and hours when the dry fly has not a chance against it, and there are other occasions when the trout will take either with more or less equal freedom.

Simultaneously with my own experiments recorded in this volume, Mr. F. M. Halford was engaged in establishing and proving his latest series of patterns, in which he endeavours to approximate more closely than ever before to the coloration and attitude of the natural insects, especially in his series of spinners. In an article over the signature "Detached Badger," which appeared in the *Field* of October 22, 1904, Mr. Halford was at some pains to prove that these spinners must be taken floating; but the feature of these patterns is that they do not, like the old patterns, sit cocked upon the surface, lifted half-hackle-high above it, but, being sparsely dressed, lie low on the water, practically flush with the surface, and thus achieve a closer approximation to the spent natural insect than did the old patterns. This, as much as the more exact coloration, may account for the success of these patterns. And, after all, a fly that is flush with the water is perilously close to the edge of wet. Tup's Indispensable fished as a spinner in the evening rise will often kill better semi-submerged and flush with the surface than thoroughly dried and oiled. It usually serves me well, and I have accordingly scarcely tried Mr. F. M. Halford's new patterns, but when I have done so it has been wet that they have been taken, and not dry.

I mentioned a few pages back that another

Itchen angler once fished the whole of a season—it may have been two—with the Red Quill in various shades and sizes, and with differences introduced by the presence or omission of tinsel tags, and he achieved a success with that one pattern or type quite as great as he enjoyed when he allowed himself the full range of the hundred best and some others.

Clearly, he and "Detached Badger" have had faith—the faith which, if it does not move mountains, will at least move trout. And the angler who takes his courage in both hands and experiments boldly with the wet fly fished upstream to his trout, or into the place where his trout should be, will find his faith, as mine has been, not without its reward.

OF THE BANK OF VANTAGE.

In looking back on a day's fly-fishing, one can realize how much has depended upon the correct selection of the bank to fish from, and an examination of some of the more important of the general considerations governing choice may not be amiss. Special conditions, such as height of banks, the trees and bushes thereon, and the accessibility of the water therefrom, may force upon us deviations from what our judgment would otherwise dictate, and it is impossible to dogmatize about these. There are also cases where the winding character of the stream presents such a constant variety of

conditions that it is impossible to say that at the moment of selection one bank is more worthy of choice than the other. But, subject to such special conditions, there are a few general principles which it is well to bear in mind in considering from which side we shall direct our attack.

The first of these is to avoid such a position as will throw the shadow of angler or rod over the fish. This is an obvious consideration, and one that is easy of application. But it does not necessarily follow that, because the sun will throw one's shadow—even a long or formidable shadow—on to the stream from, say, the right bank, one must necessarily adopt the other. It may be that the shadow will be straight across or even behind the angler, or, at any rate, in such a position as, for instance, not to interfere with his casting upstream, or upstream and across, and the river bottom may not be so bare that the fall of his shadow will send the trout scurrying upstream to disturb and put down the feeding fish above. In narrow streams, however, the effect of shadow in bolting fish upstream is necessarily far more pronounced than in streams of moderate width—say twelve to twenty yards. In like manner, the narrow stream should not, if possible, even with a favouring upstream breeze, be fished from the right bank, which necessitates holding the rod and waving line and fly over the water, or one may see one's hopes laid low for half an hour or more, and a good

stretch spoiled by the bolting of fish which, approached from the other bank by a more or less "cross-country cast," with the rod held low to the right, might have been brought to basket or turned downstream.

Probably, however, the most generally governing consideration is the direction of the wind in relation to the general trend of the stream. Perhaps the majority of fly-fishermen, if asked to choose a bank with an upstream or downstream wind, would choose the right without hesitation. But there may be a good deal to be said for the other side, apart even from the sun and the narrowness of the stream. For instance, with an upstream wind and a fairly wide river, especially if it be swift, the angler on the right bank is practically confined to his own bank and midstream fishing. If he casts for the opposite bank, he finds it extremely difficult to be accurate, and a drag which inevitably puts the fish down is almost certain to be set up. On the left bank, however, not only can he approach the left bankers more closely than he dare approach the right bankers when fishing on the right bank, not only can he tackle the midstream fish equally well, but he can cut under and against the wind and get across to the opposite bank far more accurately from the left bank than from the right, where the wind follows his hand.

Take next the case of a downstream wind. Here

the angler will want to consider what he has to do. Does he wish to fish his own bank or the opposite bank, or both ? Casting from the right bank, he can cut under the wind and get his fly over to the opposite bank far better than he could from the left ; but is it worth doing ? If he can float his fly for a reasonable distance without drag, it may well be ; but if the current be so strong as to set up an almost immediate drag, he may be practically confined to his own bank. So he would be on the left side ; but whereas casting from the right bank he would be apt to find the point of his gut cast forced outwards and downwards by the wind, and be constantly landing his line on the sedges or bank, when casting from the other side his line would fall upon the water, and the gut-point and fly be driven inwards so as to search the water quite close under the bank, just like a natural fly. Moreover, it would not be driven so far inward as it would be driven outward when cast from the opposite side, for in dropping over the bank-edge the fly and gut-point would enter, before the force of the cast is spent, into that little cushion of calm to be found just under the bank, and would generally straighten out in a manner to command admiration both from men and trout.

Take next the case of an upstream wind slightly across from the right bank to the left. Here it is even more difficult for an angler on the right bank to fish his own bank than for an angler on the left

bank, while he has more command in cutting across to the far side from the left bank than from the right. If, on the other hand, the wind be upstream and off the left bank, by standing back a bit and using a short cross-country cast the angler may get his fly very neatly over most of the fish under his own bank, and can cut across more easily than he could from the right bank.

Take, again, the case of a wind downstream and across from the right bank to the left. Here again the angler on the left bank is in the superior position for negotiating his own bank, casting almost straight into the wind, and letting fly and point be deflected under his own bank. On the right bank the angler would be apt to have his fly flung out towards midstream, and the short cross-country cast would be apt to miscarry. On the other hand, if the wind be downstream and across from the left bank, the advantage lies slightly with the right bank, but it is nothing like so marked (assuming, as we have been doing from the first, that the angler is right-handed) as in the converse case.

On the whole, therefore, it will be seen that, contrary to the generally received opinion, unless the wind be fairly direct upstream or (for the opposite bank) down, the left bank is almost invariably the bank of vantage.

OF COURAGE AND THE JEOPARDIZING OF TUPPENCE HA'PENNY.

That, my friends, is almost the extreme price of a trout-fly. Some are less. Yet how often shall you see an angler whose equipment for the taking of trout has run into pounds, and whose railway fare and reckoning at his inn are substantial items of expenditure upon the same object, throw away most sporting occasions for the attainment of his end because, forsooth, he is sure to be hung up or weeded or smashed or something equally delightful—and bang would go tuppence ha'penny! I have no patience with this sort of thing. The more hopeless the prospect of getting out a trout from an impossible place, the more determined I am to try for him. *De l'audace, encore de l'audace —toujours de l'audace!* In May, 1909, just before the May-fly began, I was by the river-side, when I heard a loud smacking sound, and, peering through a willow-bush, I saw a fine trout cruising on an eddy and sucking down flies with hearty enjoyment. If I cast over him from behind the bush, I should have to play him on a six-ounce rod with x x x gut between a thorn-bush which I could touch with my right hand and a willow I could touch with my left. There were snags above and snags below. Did I hesitate? Only long enough to tie on a new Crosbie Alder, then long enough for him to reach the top of his beat, and then I

dropped the fly behind him just before he turned. He was the satisfactory side of four pounds, and I got his successor next day out of the same place —three pounds six ounces. A beautiful brace! Luck! Of course it was luck, but I shouldn't have had it if I hadn't taken risks.

There was a Kennet trout under a willow in May-fly time. A piled snag in the steam just below the droop of the willow made it impossible to get a fly over him by casting above the willow and floating down. There was just one possible way—to make a slanting downward cut which might bring the fly down between branches in a sort of dip in the tree, and drop it on the fish's nose. I left two flies in the tree, but I did the trick and got the fish. He was only two pounds six ounces, but I thought he was bigger. Still——

Then there was a fish which lay just above a hatch-hole through which water ran into the meadows. The inevitable thing for him to do when hooked was to bolt down the hatch-hole. But somehow he didn't, and I got him. There was a pound-and-a-half trout taking tiny pale duns on the edge of a small pile of weeds collected against a broken bough of a tree, into which he was sure to bolt when hooked. But somehow he didn't, and he was steered to the landing-net with a No. 000 dun on gossamer gut attached to his nose. Then there was that trout which I got

over a barbed wire crossing the stream eight or ten yards away.

There are countless such instances—I tell of some more under the head of " Impossible Places " —but there is one thing that may safely be deposed to, and that is, that there is no place so desperate that, with luck and management, you may not get a well-hooked trout out of it.

OF IMPOSSIBLE PLACES.

The habit of a lightly hooked trout, of floundering on the surface, is too well known to need enlarging on. Sometimes his antics will be varied by leaps into the air. But is the tendency of a hard-held fish to go to weed or snag equally well realized ? Yet from a consideration of these two established tendencies may not a highly unorthodox method of extricating a good fish from the impossible position be evolved ? What is the theory ? This : Let him think he is lightly hooked.

It was on the banks of the Itchen that the first glimmerings of the idea suggested themselves. A novice with the dry fly was walking disconsolate up the stream, bemoaning himself that he could not find a rising fish. Coming up with a brother angler just about to settle down to a rising trout in some quick water, he was invited to cast over it. The fly covered the right spot, and brought up his troutship, who fastened, and, turning at once, bolted at express speed down-

stream. The novice, unaccustomed to anything more formidable than Devonshire brook trout, disregarded his companion's advice, "Run, man, run downstream for all you're worth!" and backed, open-mouthed, slowly upstream, letting out line as freely as the reel (a checkless one) would let it go. So long as the line put no check upon him the trout ploughed downstream close to the surface, but the moment the reel was empty and he felt the check he was deep in a weed-bed. He stayed there till the angler had reeled up and put on another fly. *The checked fish goes to weed.* That was the first lesson.

The second was in this wise: On a September morning a good many years back, a brace of trout were rising, a yard or so apart, above a tree which overhung the same water on the side where the angler stood knee-deep in a swampy reed-bed. It was possible to reach them if, holding by his left hand to a bough, and resting one foot on a root while dangling the other in the water, he hung over the river at an angle of forty-five degrees, and threw his line underhand up the stream. But how if he hooked his fish? There was a bank of weeds, dense and long, a yard or two above. Well, he must chance it. The likelihood of losing the fish seemed overwhelming, the chance of killing him slight; for the position was so awkward that, in order to get back to terra firma, there was nothing for it but

to tuck the rod under the arm and trust to chance while recovering equilibrium and a footing. Yet the angler got both these fish. Situated as he was he could put no pressure on them ; he could not even keep the line taut. But each of the fish when hooked came floundering and splattering unresistingly downstream, trying to throw out the stinging insect that adhered to his jaw. By the time the angler was prepared to deal with him the fish was in open water and was easily played. Result, a brace of one and a quarter pounders and the second lesson. *The unchecked fish flounders on the surface.*

What these two lessons have been worth to the angler it would be tedious to relate, but one or two instances may illustrate. There was that fish—one and three-quarter pounds he proved—rising on the far side of a dense bank of weeds in a channel two feet wide. He had to be approached with reverence on one's face, and from twenty feet out in the meadow. He took the Pink Wickham at the first time of asking, and the angler, having fastened, dropped his rod-point instantly. The fish with a startled plunge rushed up the channel and out into the open water, and began to flounder. Before he knew where he was the angler turned him, brought him down the right side of the dangerous weed-bank, and duly netted him out.

Then, again, there was that black fish between two pollard willows on the Darenth. He was rising

eighteen inches out from the bank. The willows were two yards apart, and their roots formed a mass of snags below him, while just downstream of them was a plank bridge a foot above the river. Here again it was a case of kneeling far out in the meadow and dropping the Yellow Dun exactly over the nose of the fish. He came with the most confiding simplicity. Had he been checked he would have been in the snags before one could say "Knife," but the angler, mindful of his lesson, held him not. So it befell that he rushed out into mid-stream and leapt four several times, much as does a pricked fish that is not hooked at all. But ere he could do more the angler was on terms with him, and held him out from the bank, up from the bottom, and away from the plank bridge, till the landing-net received his one pound six ounces.

Finally, let the tale be told of a trout of the Kennet that had his holt in a corner of a little bay, whence a willow-bush had fallen into the river, leaving on the bank side a tangle of broken roots, in the river to the right, some three yards off, the half-submerged willow, while above and below were heavy patches of long swaying weed. It was an ideal place for a trout to feed in—and to break away. The water came into the bay in a little defined channel between weeds, and in this a foot below the entry a sizable neb was showing at intervals. A small Green Champion May dropped exactly in the channel, and trotted down

the prescribed distance and disappeared. Again the tactics of the loosened line, again the hooked fish rushed out from his almost impregnable holt into the open, and was presently netted out by the triumphant angler—a handsome and, he thinks, a not ill-deserved three pounds ten ounces. A week later the same tactics produced another fish of two pounds eleven ounces from the same hole.

OF THE USE OF THE LANDING-NET.

There is a common superstition among anglers that the primary use of a landing-net is to land fish. Let us rather say that the use of a landing-net, rightly understood, is to assist in the capture of fish. Not to catch fish, for the catching of fish in the landing-net is mere poacher's work, but to aid in the catching. Some anglers tell you you must never show your net to a fish until ready for netting. But why not, if it will help you to kill him? There are many more or less desperate cases where the net may be of the profoundest service long before it is called to operate at the final ceremony of dipping out. I will give one or two examples in an ascending scale of complexity.

Firstly, a new use for the handle. Under the left bank of a South-Country chalk stream a trout is taking every dun that goes down alongside the cluster of cut weed under which he shelters. The angler's Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear lighting delicately a foot above, with the gut resting on the

weed, is accepted and carried straight down into the weed-bed below. The angler reels up tight over the fish, but fails to move him. Ah, there is the long-handled landing-net! A few judiciously-placed prods with the butt bring him plunging stupidly out, and he is bustled down into open water and promptly dipped out with the other end.

Secondly, the use of the mesh. Scene: A hooked fish racing downstream towards a dense weed-bed on the angler's side. The angler offers the net, and the fish sheers off into midstream, and is towed past the dangerous obstruction. Very simple examples these.

The third and next is more complex. Scene: A hatch-hole which lets water from the same stream into a carrier in the water-meadows. Camp-sheathing on both sides of the hatch, supported by three successive crossbars from four feet to eight feet long as the sides diverge. Under the middle bar lies a good trout, very evidently feeding. Problem, how to get him. It is impossible to cast underneath the crossbars. One can only cast over them, and trust to luck and judgment to get the fish out if one hooks him. If he runs downstream the line is doubled over the crossbar and a break is assured. But how is he to be prevented? The angler knows that under the apron of the hatch there is a big hole, and he sets to work with confidence. The fly is dropped from below, just

over the third or shortest bar. The drag of the oiled silk line brings it back till it passes over the third bar, and drops softly on the water with a foot or two to float before it can drag. Presently it is taken, and the hooked fish has turned to bolt down the carrier. But there the angler is ready. Landing-net in hand, he gesticulates wildly at the advancing fish, which bolts upstream again and buries itself in the hole under the apron. Softly the rod is passed under the second and lowest crossbars, then the point is brought down to the water's edge, and with a steady strain and a jarring tap on the butt of the rod the trout is brought down out of his fastness and killed in due course.

Lastly, another example of a similar method. Imagine a strong stream some three yards wide and one hundred yards or so long, running down from a similar hatch to a big cross-dyke reaching out on both sides. The angler is on the right bank, and the current turns to the left on reaching the dyke. The water for the latter half of the carrier is too deep for wading. In the broad gravel shallow at the tail of the patch a big two-pounder is lying. The angler has already been run by a much smaller fish down to the verge of the carrier, where the stream turns off, and only netted his trout just in time. For various reasons the other bank is unsuitable to fish from. To begin with, the big trout is not accessible from that side. Even from

the left bank it is difficult to cast over him, but presently our artist with the landing-net gives the appropriate response to the dimpling rise with which he takes the Ginger Quill, and a good sound working connection is established. For a moment the angler does not put a pull on him, and he moves out into the strong water, shaking his head to get rid of that objectionable insect that has fastened in his palate. The angler rapidly winds in line, and begins to hold him firmly. His aim is to keep him tiring himself in the strong water—not to drive him up under the apron (it is unnecessary to run that risk now), but to keep him from running down. The stream is narrow enough to enable the angler, by dipping his rod-point to right or left, to turn the fish from every upward rush to such a holt, but in a few moments comes the downward rush. Now for the landing-net. In an instant the fish has turned and is back facing the strong water, and engaged in fighting to get up into the shelter of the hatch. But again and again he is turned and brought down to the edge of the gravel shelf where the stream is strongest, when a hint from the landing-net sends him up again straining with all his force against both stream and line. Presently, tiring of the game, and failing in his efforts to rub out the hook against the camp-sheathing, he turns and bolts downstream with such suddenness as to evade the threatening net, and is gone forty yards

before the angler is level with him. Then again a threat of the net turns him, and he makes a dash for a weed-bed some ten yards or so above. From this he has to be turned down, and his downward rush stopped with the net as before. From this point the fight resolves itself into a series of downstream rushes, alternating with much briefer trips upstream, terminated by the necessity in each case for pulling the trout down out of the weed-bed he is bolting for. At last, at the very bottom of the straight, on the edge of the dyke, the fish, not yet half beaten, has to be dragged willy-nilly into the landing-net, or else he must escape down the dyke which streams away on the far side.

Finally, and in conclusion, one more example. The *locus in quo* is a piece of fast water some eight or ten yards long, a sort of tumbling-bay, from which the water escapes at racing pace through a culvert twelve or fourteen feet long, which passes under a farm road, thence along some two hundred yards of narrow weedy carrier to an irrigation hatch. In the tumbling-bay are three or four fine fish, one of them something over two pounds. All are feeding on something under water, probably nymphs. A dry fly would drag at once. A double-hooked Greenwell's Glory, as used on North-Country rivers, might do the trick. But the hooked fish will to a certainty bolt down the culvert, and then it will be a case of smash at once, or weeding with a long

line, and the impossible task of bringing the fish up the racing stream into the tumbling-bay again, or of passing the ten-foot rod through a twelve-foot culvert. Happy thought! there on the bank is a plank that has been floated down the stream above, there is some string, and there is the watcher to lend a hand. He receives the landing-net, and goes below some fifteen yards or so. Presently the fly drops well soaked on the water, and swings over the best of the trout, which the next minute has raced down and through the culvert, tearing out line until—yes, until the menacing net in the hands of the watcher sends him securely to weed. Now for the plank. A minute serves to tie on the rod and to send the plank floating down through the culvert. The watcher is ready on the other side with the landing-net, and draws the plank to the side. The rod is released, and soon the angler stands over the fish with a short line. Now for the net again. A few well-directed prods with the butt brings up the fish, who bolts for the culvert. But the net is before him on the far side, and he gets back into the tumbling-bay. Guiding the line with the butt, a pull is got on him which soon brings him down again below the culvert. The only remaining dangers are the weeds and the hatch-hole at the far end. From this last the net is again ready to keep him, and the great battle ends as every such battle should.

OF THE WEEDING TROUT.

It has been shown how it was frequently possible to extract a big trout from an apparently impossible fastness by a tactical trick. Every angler knows that a trout who is, or conceives himself to be, lightly hooked will thrash about upon the surface in his effort to dislodge the fly, very often with success, though not always; for occasionally the hook will have a small but sufficient hold in some inaccessible place, such as the corner of the jaw, and all is well with the angler. It is by playing upon this idiosyncrasy and slackening on a fish immediately after it is hooked that the trout may frequently be induced to run from an impenetrable holt into the open in order to kick himself free from the surface. The same idiosyncrasy may be worked upon with a weeding fish, with gratifying results. If the angler hooks a fish which turns and bolts downstream below him, he will note that the fish will not go to weed until he is held. The moment he is held he will whip into the first available weed-bed. That is the first step in our argument. The next is this: The harder he is held the more frightened he becomes, and the deeper and the more desperately he will burrow in the weeds.

But one day it occurred to me to try upon the trout that has got to weed the tactics of inducing him to believe himself lightly hooked. To let him

go altogether for a time till he recovered his nerve and came out was an old and often unsuccessful device. To hand-line him was to put a much harder pull upon him than could be put on with a rod, and though it sometimes worked, it was by no means always successful. For the new method, therefore, it was necessary to maintain a light pull upon the fish, but so light that the rod-top gave to every movement, leaving the fish almost as free as if he were loose, but with just the difference that there was enough strain to keep him beating, and enough to provide a fulcrum for him to beat from. The experiment was brilliantly successful. On the first occasion on which it was tried, three trout (all over two pounds) were hooked in a weedy portion of the Itchen upon the lightest tackle and a delicate rod. Each went to weed. The angler held his hand high (for the rod was but nine feet), and kept the very lightest strain, with the result that the fish began to beat among the weeds as he would on the surface, and in a few moments had lashed the weeds aside and kicked himself free of them, and was on top. Once there he was resolutely hauled downstream and bustled into the net. This method has been worth many a good fish since that day ; indeed, given a fairly soundly hooked fish, there have been no failures. Of course, nothing will save a fish so lightly hooked that the first touch of weed or obstruction releases him. In applying this

method, the light rod, which has come to be so common, has an advantage over the big, heavy, and clumsy weapon so frequently in the hands of dry-fly men in the recent past. This is indeed a notable instance of the superiority of the *suaviter in modo* over the *fortiter in re*.

OF THE LIGHT ROD ON CHALK STREAMS.

In the catalog (I spell the word in the American manner) of the house of William Mills and Son of New York there is a portrait of Mr. Humphrey Priddis (whose signature "Dabchick" at the foot of Itchen reports is familiar to all readers of the *Field*) holding up a two and one-eighth pound trout which he had just killed on a two and one-eighth ounce Leonard rod, the property of young Mr. Mills, a son of that house. I was down on the Itchen the afternoon on which that feat was done. I saw the rod, the fish, and the captor, and the place was pointed out to me. The water was full of dense masses of waving weeds, and in accomplishing the capture of such a fish—a large one for the water—on such a rod there is no doubt that the angler executed a feat of which he had every right to be proud. He declared himself amazed at the power of the rod, and that he could throw three-and-twenty yards with it.

Young Mr. Mills was fishing with a nine-foot rod weighing five ounces, a delightful tool capable of

casting a heavy tapered Halford line with wonderful command. I had the privilege of trying it, and I promptly acquired its duplicate, in addition to the ten-footer of the same make which I already possessed and had used the previous season.

I am not going to reargue here the long controversy of light rod *versus* the old-style ounce-to-the-foot weapon. The light rod has won its place, and has come to stay. Those who have tried it fairly are convinced that it will answer all necessary calls for casting, that it is fully equal to butting and killing large trout, and that it adds a daintiness to the art of fly-fishing which the old-time anglers of the heavy rod were hardly conscious it lacked. But I do want to press three points in its favour beyond those enumerated: (1) It casts a delightful *short* line, and I confess to fishing consistently with the shortest line I dare use, often with most of that in the country; (2) it can be fished steadily all day, wet or dry, without tiring the hand—what a change from those terrible wrist-breaking, hand-paralyzing, blister-producing flails of the eighties and nineties! and (3) it enables one to play light with unequalled sensitiveness. When I was a boy at Winchester, old John Hammond had the length commonly known nowadays as Chalkley's, and I well remember the rods which old John used to turn out for fishing the Itchen. They were soft and floppy

to an extent which would nowadays lead to their immediate rejection; but I have seen the maker with one of them steer a good fish, hooked under the opposite bank, by sheer handling over dense weed, into the waiting landing-net. And remembering this, and remembering how a fish which goes to weed can, if lightly handled from the first, be forced, by play on his idiosyncrasy, to beat himself free and up to the surface, I am inclined to think that the modern angler is far too much inclined to use force in handling a hooked fish, and that a rod which achieves—as the light split canes of the highest class do—a combination of steely quickness and casting power with something of the sensitive delicacy of the wood rods of old John Hammond is the equipment to have in a tussle with a big fish on fine tackle.

To kill a brace of trout four pounds and three pounds six ounces on xxx gut in deep weedy and snag-infested water between two bushes which I could touch with either hand, and which prevented movement up or down stream, is a feat which I am sure my old-time heavy rods could have done no better than did my six-ounce ten-footer in 1909. Force was no good in such a place, and force was never used until each trout had been sufficiently bewildered and fatigued by beating in vain against the nothing which restrained him to be kept more or less under the rod's point till ready for the net.

OF WET-FLY CASTING.

The use of rods which carry a heavy reel line is so general on chalk streams that probably the easy drying of the fly and cast is taken as a matter of course, and it is little recognized how much is due to the weight of the line driving the fly rapidly through the air. If the angler were devoting himself to wet-fly fishing on a rough river, he would avoid such a casting line, and if he means to fish a chalk stream wet-fly only, he would do the same. But he would need to be able to propel his fly and line upstream against the wind, and to cast a fairly long line not infrequently, so that a line with more weight in it than would be required for a rough river would be essential on a chalk stream. But if, as is the wiser course, the angler proposes to fish either wet or dry, as occasion demands, his equipment must be still more of a compromise. He must use a rod which will carry a line that will dry the fly with sufficient speed, but preferably not a line of the heaviest class; and he must trust to the make of his flies, and to the soaking they get through trailing in the water before the cast, to get them to go under on lighting. The knack can be acquired without difficulty, but if the dry-fly habit has become inveterate he will need to be continually watching himself when he desires to fish wet.

The line should be flicked as little as possible, and the angler should try (generally speaking, but not always—see chapter on Nerves) to float the gut while letting the fly go under. Then he secures the double advantage of not lining his trout and of getting an indication from the movement of the gut should the fly be taken without his otherwise detecting it. The fly, being once delivered, may be allowed to come down with the stream precisely like a dry fly except for its being under water; but it can be recovered sooner and with less disturbance of the surface, because the fly is drawn under and not along the top of the water. The withdrawal should, however, be as gentle as possible, in order to retain as much moisture as can be in the fly to sink it at the next cast. If there be enough wind to raise waves, or even a strong ruffle, this is of less consequence, as the make of the fly should be such that it can only float, if at all, while quite dry on perfectly smooth water. It is in general no use to put up the ordinary dry flies to fish wet.

CHAPTER X

FRANKLY IRRELEVANT

A DRY-FLY MEMORY.

In the Test Valley a good many years ago the coarse herbage lay drying in the water-meadows in the heavy swathes in which it had fallen to the scythe, but all along the boggy edges of the streams and carriers a tall screen had been left standing shoulder-high, concealing the angler from the rising fish, but compelling him, unfortunately, to stand and to fish overhand instead of keeping low and switching a horizontal line to his quarry. During the afternoon a chilly wind from the north-west had supervened upon the blazing heat that for a week past had conjured such alluring visions of the evening rise to end each July day. The sky was overcast, and a troubled sun watched sulkily from the far side of the valley, through dun rifts in the clouds, the approach of two rods to the river-side. It was almost too early to begin. Scarce a fly was in the air, and only one sign of any promise gave any hint of possible success—the horses in the meadow opposite, driven to madness by the

Hampshire flies, were charging and careering wildly about their pasture, heels half the time in air.

Just a cast above the bottom boundary was a run which promised a moving fish when the trout began to move, and half an hour's wait in these exquisite meadows was time well spent, if only in observing the splendid profusion of life in this wonderful valley. The tender bloom of the meadowsweet was at its most perfect, great wild purple orchids put up among the boggy tussocks, while the lush richness of the water-side herbage baffled description. From some meadow near came the "crek, crek" of the landrail—less common, alas! than of old—the note of the snipe, the wailing cry of the pewit, the "coo" of the turtle-dove, were punctuated with the querulous gutturals of the moorhen, shyly under cover in the sedges. Presently a small pale olive rose from the surface and came drifting down the wind, then another and another, escaping their water-enemies below only, too often, to be snapped up by the screeching swifts that found them out too soon. Then, in the very neck of the run, a fish put up, and the serious business of the evening began.

The fly on the cast was a Tup's Indispensable, then the latest invention of an ingenious West-Country angler, and, when the red spinner is up, a very killing fly, but the fish, continuing to feed, would none of him. Nor was the Red Quill to his liking, but the first cast of a Ginger Quill on No. 00,

covering him correctly, brought him up, and he fastened. For a second he hesitated, then ripped the line from the shrieking reel in an upward rush, leapt into the air, and was off.

By this time the sun's lower limb was resting on the opposite hill, and the wind should have dropped dead. But still it came with a certain bite of chill down the valley from the northward. Yet, in spite of cold, the long, fleshy forest fly vied with the mosquito in assaults upon the unprotected portions of the angler, and moths and sedges began to creep out and flit from flower to flower. Two other fish putting up in the next hundred yards were missed, and a small one was landed and returned. Then, as dusk drew on, the fly was changed for a large Orange Quill on a No. 2 hook.

A good fish was rising steadily, though not rapidly, in the next bend, but the Orange Quill, offered from perhaps too short a range, set him down with great suddenness. A shy fish! So was the next found rising, for he did not wait even the preliminary wave of the rod to cease from his impetuous and greedy feeding. Perhaps the necessary wading through the boggy margin to get near enough to the water for an effective cast sent over him a wave that put him down.

The next hundred yards provided no opportunity for the angler, but at the end of them the sedgy screen ceased suddenly, and it was possible to approach the shy quarry with a horizontal

cast. Over a bank of weed trailing near the surface an under-water movement seemed to indicate a fish of some sort. The fly, an Orange Sedge on a No. 2 hook, dropped lightly on the right spot, with a line behind it slack enough to let it pass well over the fish before the inevitable drag set in. Up came a big black neb. Instinctively the line tightened, but the fish was already hard in the weed, and nothing could coax or force him out. Ten precious minutes wasted, at a time when minutes were priceless, in vain attempts to persuade him, before the inevitable break was affected and a new fly tied on.

A few yards farther on a snag divided the current, and a foot above it a good fish was taking merrily every fly that covered him. He was not proof against the Orange Sedge, and in a moment he was being led flapping down on the farther side of the snag. Nothing seemed to intervene between him and the landing-net, when suddenly the rod straightened and he was gone. A feel at the hook in the growing dark proved it to have broken at the bend. With difficulty another was mounted, but by this the rise had ceased, and naught was left for the angler but to feel his boggy way back through the eerie meadows to his starting-point, and thence to the village—disappointed to a certain extent, but with the disappointment more than tempered by the amazing charm of this valley of valleys.

CHAPTER XI

ETHICS OF THE WET FLY

In dealing with this subject, I am conscious that I start with a weight of opinion against me among the fishermen of chalk streams. I have known some of them say in a shocked tone, "But that is wet-fly!" as if it were some high crime and misdemeanour to use a wet fly upon a chalk stream. To make my peace with such I want to argue this question out, and test and see what it is about the wet fly which has brought such discredit upon it among the best sportsmen in the world.

It is axiomatic with many that it is unsuccessful upon chalk streams. That is not my opinion, but in itself it is not an objection. If it were unfairly successful it would be another story. The object of fly-fishing, whether wet or dry, is the catching of trout, not anyhow, but by means refined, clean, delicate, artistic, and sportsmanlike in the sense that they are fair to the quarry and fair to the brother angler. There can be no doubt that the dry fly honestly fulfils all these conditions. Let us see where the wet fly fails.

It is said the wet-fly man's game is a duffer's game, which needs neither knowledge nor any skill beyond enough to cast a long line down-stream or across and down; that it leads to a raking of the water, often with two or three flies; that it leads to the pricking and scaring of many fish, to the catching of many undersized trout, and to the undue disturbance of long stretches of water, to the detriment of the nerves of the fish and the sport of other anglers. All this I am quite willing to accept and to eliminate from the legitimate all wet-fly fishing which could come under this description.

What is left to the wet-fly angler? I venture to say a mighty pretty, delicate, and delightful art which resembles dry-fly fishing in that the fly is cast upstream or across, to individual fish, or to places where it is reasonable to expect that a fish of suitable proportions may be found, and differs from dry-fly fishing only in the amount of material used in the dressing of the fly, in the force with which that fly is cast, and in the extreme subtlety of the indications frequently attending the taking of the fly by the fish, compared to which there is a painful obviousness in the taking of the dry fly. Add to this that it provides means for the circumventing of bulgers and feeders on larvæ, that it furnishes sport on those numerous occasions when trout are in position and probably feeding under water without ever breaking the surface,

and generally widens the opportunities of sport for the man who cannot be always on the spot to seize the best opportunities afforded by a rise of trout to the floating fly.

Is this method open to any of the objections attending the downstream raking we concur in condemning? Is it a duffer's game? Is it easier than dry-fly fishing? Try and see. Does it lead to the pricking and scaring of many fish which follow a dragging fly? No. Does it unduly disturb long stretches of water to the detriment of the brother angler? Why, it is as easy to spend an afternoon on a hundred yards as it is in the purest cult of the dry fly.

If the trout are feeding, I for one fail to see why they may legitimately be fished for if they are taking a small proportion of their food on the surface, but not if they are taking all, or practically all, of it underneath. There is a sentence from Francis Francis quoted with approval by Mr. F. M. Halford, which runs as follows:

"The judicious and perfect application of dry, wet, and midwater fly-fishing stamps the finished fly-fisher with the hall-mark of efficiency."

Nothing could be more just if one reads it with reference to all streams, whether chalk streams or otherwise; but to read it distributively so that only the dry fly may be used on chalk streams, and only the wet fly on other streams, seems an unnecessary renunciation of opportunity; while to read it as

meaning that only the dry fly may be used on chalk streams, while wet or dry fly may be legitimately used on others, carries its own condemnation in logic.

Mr. F. M. Halford, with every desire to be absolutely fair, has, I think, in Chapter II. of "Dry-Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice," done more than any other man to discredit the wet fly on chalk streams, by the implications, first, that the principle of the dry-fly method—viz., the casting of the fly to a feeding fish in position—is not applicable to the wet-fly method, and, secondly, that on the stillest days, with the hottest sun and the clearest water, the wet fly is utterly hopeless. On both these points I respectfully join issue with him.

On all that his book contains on the positive side about the dry fly I am in practical agreement. But if the reader considers the rods, the lines, and the flies, that Mr. Halford recommends, he will see that they are utterly unsuited to wet-fly fishing, and it would not be surprising that no success attends them when used for wet-fly work. But if I am right—and I am—in asserting that, given reasonably suitable gear, the wet fly *may* be cast upstream in chalk streams to a feeding fish in position (whether surface feeding or not is, I submit, irrelevant), and that on its day—and there are many such in the season—it will kill fish alike in the hottest, brightest, and stillest weather, and on days and in places and conditions where the dry

fly is hopeless, and also in the roughest of weather, then I may claim that it is an art worthy to stand beside the art of the dry fly as a supplementary resource of the angler that is at once fair, sportsmanlike, and capable of adding immensely to his enjoyment, his sport, and his opportunities for using the highest skill, not inferior in any sense (except in the matter of the avoidance of drag) to that exercised by the dry-fly expert.

CHAPTER XII

APOLOGIA

HAVING read through the foregoing pages, I am (indeed, I could hardly fail to be) conscious that I have written dogmatically, that I have used the first person singular with some freedom—more freedom than I had supposed. But I am not going to change it. What I had to say, stretched over a period of years, has been too strong for me. I wanted to elaborate a system, and all I have done is to tell my personal experiences in search of a system. If I have written positively, I would not have it supposed that I claim to be a master of angling, or that I do not incur by the water-side my full share—perhaps more than my full share—of mistakes, tangles, bungles, disasters. But, for all that, I claim to be entitled to speak positively of the things which I have tried and tested for myself and know of my own knowledge. No man can really know either these same things or any other things by reading them in a book or by accepting them upon any authority, whether it be that of Mr. F. M. Halford or another.

Nothing presents itself to any two minds in an identical light. We all see the multicoloured facets of truth from a different angle. No experience is the same to two diverse idiosyncrasies, and the only help which the writing of a book of this kind can be to others is, not in the laying down of rules, not in the preaching or advocating of systems, not in teaching that which the writer has beaten out by his own experience, but in hints which start or help trains of observation or inquiry in the reader's mind, so as to stimulate him by personal thought and experiment to work out, and prove, and make his own, the conclusions which his own personality is capable of drawing from the test.

In this way only is progress possible. In this, and in doing something to assure that, in the new learning and in the new systems which come along, that which is of value in the systems of the past shall not be forgotten, but shall be transmuted to the uses of the present and the future, is all the justification I can plead for the foregoing pages.

In giving records of my own experience by the water-side rather than in laying down a system, I am not asking others to do as I do because I say it, or to accept anything from me. I would have no weight allowed by any man to tradition or authority until it is proved by himself; no man's words accepted as final because they are his;

everything questioned, tested, and brought to the dock of practical experience. If I have ventured, indirectly, to preach at all, the sum of my preaching is not a system, a method, but an attitude of mind—the importance of being earnest, the power of faith, the observant eye, the unfettered judgment, independence of tradition, and, above all, the inquiring mind.

With these words I commit my pages to the judgment or kindness of my brother anglers with a cordial

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